University of Alberta

The role and impact of paraprofessionals in inclusive education settings for students with disabilities: Student, parent and paraprofessional perspectives.

by

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Abstract

Qualitative studies have been conducted on included students with mild to severe disabilities in various ways; predominately through the perspectives of teachers, parents, and paraprofessionals. Few studies however, have examined the perspectives of students with disabilities. The extent to which paraprofessional practices are impacting students with a variety of mild to severe developmental disabilities is a crucial question that to date remains under-researched and unanswered. This study utilizes semi-structured interviews to examine the perspectives of student, parent, and paraprofessional triads on the utilization of paraprofessional supports. The data presented is based upon basic qualitative inquiry and provides insight and understanding through the various perspectives, compares perceptions of students, parents, and paraprofessionals and provides a context for potential changes in practice. Five resulting themes will be presented: (1) impact on peer interactions, (2) impact on student autonomy, (3) educational assistant attributes, (4) impact on teacher role, and (5) impact on school inclusion.

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Last but not least, to all children with developmental disabilities who work so hard to be included and accepted, I will spend my life working to make things better for you.

Dedication

For my Mom and Dad.

I am forever grateful for your unconditional support. Without you I would not be who I am or where I am. For everything you both are and all you have done for me, thank-you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Context of the Problem

In Alberta, Policy 1.6.1-*The Educational Placement of Students with Special Needs* asserts that educating students with special needs in regular classrooms in neighborhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff (updated January 2003). Provincial educational policies for students with disabilities grew out of section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This section guaranteed equality rights, and freedoms from discrimination, for people who have a "mental or physical disability" (1982). The rights for non-discrimination for those persons whose learning disabilities are categorized as mental, physical, or both, were extended to educational systems with the result that specific policies were implemented on a provincial basis to ensure these rights were in fact translated into practice. As a result of such provincial policies, there has been a steep rise in paraprofessional use in general education settings, as an essential means of classroom support for teachers. Moreover, the role expectations for paraprofessionals have broadened substantially to include a variety of tasks, and greater involvement throughout the instructional process for students with disabilities (Pickett, 1997).

In the United States, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 focused national attention on paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities in public schools in the United States. Amendments to this statute allow for "paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised… to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services

to children with disabilities (20 U.S.C 1412 (a) (15) (B) (iii)). The reauthorization prompted a gain in momentum of paraprofessional utilization in the educational system for students with disabilities. The purported rationale for this increase of services was to reduce the number of non-professional tasks required by teachers, improve student to adult ratios, to provide appropriate adult models, and to ensure the safety of students with and without disabilities (Werts, Zigmond, & Leeper, 2001).

Over the past few decades, the role and presence of the paraprofessional in schools has evolved from duties more administrative in nature to those involving more instructional content (Lamont & Hill, 1991). They are increasingly expected to participate in all aspects of the instructional process while working at greater levels of independence (Pickett, 1997). This evolution is based upon a common sense assumption that the presence of a paraprofessional is an extra pair of hands, which is beneficial for students in the classroom with special academic, behavioral, and social needs. It seems paradoxical that, despite a lack of planning and careful consideration of the impact of their role, the use of paraprofessionals is escalating in most educational systems with a major focus on assisting students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Werts et al., 2001). The underlying assumption is that the use of paraprofessionals will improve student outcomes within the educational system, both academically and socially. Nevertheless, the actual extent to which this practice impacts students with a variety of disabilities is an imperative question that to date, remains under-researched and unanswered. Thus far, there is a lack of evidence to support the efficacy of the increased reliance on paraprofessional supports for students with disabilities. One-to-one assignment of paraprofessionals is used more and more often for students with disabilities

without any knowledge of the potential impact on these students (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999). An initial step in addressing the potential impact of their use is to question the students themselves to gain an insider's perspective of the impact of the paraprofessional role on their inclusive experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' with disabilities perspectives on the role and impact of paraprofessional use in their classes and inclusive school settings. The study investigates and compares student, paraprofessional, and parental perspectives on the paraprofessional role and impact on students with developmental disabilities and inclusive education practice. To this end, the perspectives of the paraprofessional role in the following areas will be examined: student personal control, peer relations, dependency on adults, instructional relationship of teachers compared to paraprofessionals, and inclusion.

Significance

Paraprofessionals are playing an increasingly large role in the academic lives of students with disabilities. Concomitantly, there is an emergent trend of parents of students with disabilities arguing for their children to be educated in general education classrooms along with the belief that paraprofessionals are an important support for their children in these inclusive placements. Yet, the assumed positive effect of this support on the included student remains unconfirmed. In fact, some researchers argue that the use of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings may actually be detrimental (Giangreco, et al. 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997). It is critical that we hear the voices of students with disabilities who are placed with paraprofessional support in

classrooms. To date, their views on this topic remain unheard. It is essential to investigate the role of self-determination in making decisions about paraprofessionals. Examining paraprofessional support through the voices of students with disabilities affords the opportunity to develop an understanding of the impact of paraprofessional support and how the support is perceived by its recipients. Through their voices we can make a contribution to the existing literature, and document the concerns of the students receiving the support. By hearing their stories, we may begin to explore new areas of inquiry to improve the ways that paraprofessionals work with students with disabilities, and possibly effect improved learning outcomes (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005).

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions: (1) According to students with disabilities in inclusive education settings, what is the role and impact of having paraprofessional supports? and (2) How do the perceptions of students compare to parents/guardians and paraprofessionals' perspectives on the role and impact of paraprofessional supports?

A review of literature on existing research findings for paraprofessional supports will be presented in Chapter two. In Chapter three there will be a discussion on the approach to selection and the interviewing of participants along with the presentation of the method chosen for data analysis and ethical considerations. In Chapter four, results accompanied by descriptive examples of resulting themes from participant interviews are presented. In the fifth and final Chapter the research findings within the context of existing research is discussed. For purposes of clarity, the term paraprofessional will be used synonymously with educational assistant (EA) throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

An examination of professional journals containing both quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken to determine the body of existing research related to the study questions. In order to understand the context of the problem, it is important to review the history and evolution of paraprofessional use and the current trends. In addition, it is necessary to review the existing literature on the perspectives of students, parents, and paraprofessionals in order to understand the contributions of this current study. Both advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessional use in the education of students with disabilities will be discussed within the context of their potential impact.

History and Evolution of Paraprofessional Use

To understand the evolution of the paraprofessional role in inclusive education it is necessary to review their role historically. Knowledge of current trends in the use and training of paraprofessionals is essential in understanding the context of their role in assisting students with disabilities today. In addition to contributing to current knowledge, examining perceptions of the paraprofessionals, teachers, and parents of students with disabilities on the role of paraprofessionals provides insight into the popularity of their use.

A large body of literature exists on the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Studies have been conducted on students with mild to severe disabilities in various ways. Paraprofessional perspectives have been studied relating to roles and responsibilities, but few studies exist on their perspectives of the impact on students with disabilities. An even fewer number of studies exist on parental

perspectives of the issues relating to paraprofessional use. Canadian research contributions on these topics are even more limited. To date, students with mild to severe cognitive and developmental disabilities' perspectives of paraprofessional use is virtually absent from literature. Given the nature of the research purpose, studies of paraprofessional and parent perspectives were reviewed in order to examine recurring themes and issues uncovered by the limited research. Relative advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessional use will be discussed, however perspectives and attitudes are the focus for review given that few studies have examined paraprofessional effectiveness or impact that they may have in the classroom (Jones & Bender, 1993). The lack of Canadian research on parental and paraprofessional perspectives, along with the absence of research on student perspectives of the paraprofessional makes this study an important precursor for continued research.

The presence of paraprofessionals in the field of special education has been evident for the first half of the 20th century in the capacity of administrative assistant. In addition to administrative duties, paraprofessionals have assisted educators with the physical care and management of students with disabilities, such as autism (Boomer, 1994). During this time however, paraprofessionals' duties were predominately administrative in nature focused largely on assisting teachers in "maintaining supplies and equipment and preparing classroom materials" (Boomer, p.1). Following the end of World War II, school districts were left with a shortage of teachers, and consequently more support was needed in different forms than purely administrative assistance (Pickett, 1997). In response to this need, paraprofessionals were utilized to address the persistent shortage of qualified professionals (Pickett, 1999). At the same time, changing

North American social ideology based in part on a moral conscience related to the treatment of individuals with disabilities, led to changes in social policy. This new moral conscience was translated in the U.S. into legislation, specifically Public Law 142 (PL-142), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Even though the use of paraprofessionals in classrooms was already firmly established practice, the Act created a perceived urgent need for paraprofessionals. Children with a variety of disabilities were, as a result, now legally protected to receive a free and appropriate education in the educational system. The four purposes of the Act were (1) to improve access to education for children with disabilities, (2) to improve how children with disabilities were identified and educated, (3) to evaluate the success of these efforts, and (4) to provide due process protections for children and families. It is important to note that this legislation grew out of concern for children with disabilities who were excluded entirely from the educational system and for those who had only limited access.

In Canada, the Constitution Act of 1982 recognized equality for persons with disabilities via Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). The charter guaranteed equality rights and non-discrimination for persons whose learning disabilities are categorized as mental, physical, or both. These rights extended into the educational systems with specific policies being implemented on a provincial basis to ensure these rights. Issues of improved access fuelled the necessity and use of paraprofessionals to assist in the education of students with disabilities. In addition, increases in early childhood education services and services for transition-aged students with disabilities contributed to the increase in the number of paraprofessionals in the education system (French & Pickett, 1997). In contrast to practices predominant in earlier

years, school-aged students with more severe disabilities were increasingly being provided access to general education classrooms during this period as the rights of students with disabilities were now legally mandated (Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

Current Trends

The change in paraprofessional roles from administrative in nature to instructional support for teachers has evolved gradually over time. This evolution is largely tied to the general inclusion movement. Changes in research and policy terminology, from integration to mainstreaming and the currently used term of inclusion reflect an increasing level of social and educational support for children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers. Parents of children with disabilities, from mild to severe, have been vital advocates to produce such support for inclusion and the resulting practices (French & Chopra, 1999; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 1999). Concomitant to the push for inclusion, parents and teachers alike believe that the success of inclusive placement for children with disabilities necessitates the employment of paraprofessionals (French & Chopra; Wolery, Werts, Caldwell, Snyder, & Lisowski, 1995). Given this belief, the inclusion movement has in essence, resulted in a paraprofessional movement.

In a study of four schools in Vermont, Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman (2002) found a substantial increase in the utilization of paraprofessionals and also noted that the role expectations for paraprofessionals have become increasingly instructional. In the U.S., by the mid 1990s, paraprofessionals' roles shifted dramatically, with a substantial portion of their time being dedicated to the instructional needs of individuals or small groups of children (French, 1999). Indeed, there has been a substantial change in the perception of the paraprofessional role as being equivalent to the teacher role (French &

Chopra). The different educational and training requirements for teachers versus paraprofessionals are of course quite substantial and the view of instructional equivalency is at the core misguided and potentially detrimental to the learning needs of students.

One of the most likely contributors to this misperception is that qualitative literature has been dominated by topics related to roles and responsibilities and a focus on orientation and training with no consensus on what is appropriate. It is widely apparent that the concrete roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in general education settings have yet to be clearly delineated (French & Pickett, 1997). This apparent lack of consensus regarding appropriate tasks for paraprofessionals has resulted in confusion for teachers and paraprofessionals alike to know exactly what their individual responsibilities are (Lamont & Hill, 1991). Adding to this problem, Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, and Doyle, (2001) assert that no studies have focused on how paraprofessionals actually work with students and school personnel. In support, at least one study reveals that teachers perceive that the reason for paraprofessional assistance is to help them out, meet the needs of the students and to be able to fill in all the gaps (French, 1999). The ambiguous nature of these expectations makes it difficult to assess what abilities and role description would promote effective paraprofessional training for students with disabilities. Given that having paraprofessionals accompany students with disabilities in special and general education classes is considered essential by many teachers, roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined to promote success for the student (Wolery et. al., 1995).

The services provided by paraprofessionals can conceivably have a major impact on the education of students with disabilities, thus it is critical that the nature of their role should be clearly defined and match their education and training background (Giangreco

et al., 2001). In terms of training and education, qualitative studies suggest that pre-service training and in-service opportunities are virtually nonexistent for paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al). It is a paradox that despite the lack of training, paraprofessionals are assigned to students who exhibit the most challenging needs, both behavioral and academic (Giangreco et al, 1999). Regardless of the training concerns, certain roles and duties have emerged from the literature.

Some of the main roles of paraprofessionals that have been reported in the literature include: (a) providing instruction in academic subjects, (b) supporting students with challenging behaviors, (c) providing personal care, (d) facilitating peer interaction, and (e) collecting and managing data about the students (Boomer, 1994; French, 1999). It is however important to note that paraprofessionals have been found to be involved in a broad range of tasks for which they were untrained to perform (Jones & Bender, 1993; Giangreco et al, 1999; French & Pickett, 1997). Some of the reported responsibilities that have raised concern include student testing and assessment, adaptation and modification of curriculum, extent and nature of instruction, and communication with families (French & Chopra, 1999; Lamont & Hill, 1991; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). It should be noted that this inquiry into reliance on the paraprofessional role for students with disabilities has only just commenced within the last decade (Marks et al). Given the lack of outcome data on the efficacy of paraprofessional use to enhance student outcomes, a question that needs to be addressed is why they are still employed in the capacity previously described, in the absence of a supportive theoretical or research basis. One promising direction in recent literature is to investigate the perspectives of those at the core of the situation; students, parents, and paraprofessionals.

Perspectives

Student Perspectives

The perspectives of students with disabilities are markedly absent from the literature on paraprofessional use. Only recently has a study been published on this topic. Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) interviewed young adults with intellectual disabilities regarding their past experiences of attending classes with paraprofessional support. The analysis of data resulted in four themes regarding the relationship styles of paraprofessionals perceived by young adults as (1) paraprofessional as mother, (2) as friend, (3) as protector, and (4) as primary teacher. All of these themes suggest a positive experience for paraprofessional support. Participants provided positive statements within these themes, but the extent to which these roles were indeed positive, is questionable. The authors argued that one of the critical components of schooling for students is to establish relationships, their identity, and to separate from their parents; in essence gain friendships and independence.

The four themes uncovered in this study illustrate a diminished potential for these gains, and raise further question about the appropriateness of the current use of paraprofessional supports in the education of students with disabilities. The relationship of mother can impact the social status of the child negatively. When the paraprofessional-student relationship is perceived as mothering, "students are denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social-emotional maturations" (Broer et al. p.425). The relationship perceived as friendship has similar negative implications. This type of relationship can be suggestive of a lack of age-appropriate peer networks. Protecting students from bullies (protector relationships) may

seem laden with benevolent intentions, but the authors suggest that students with disabilities need to be taught how to problem-solve and react appropriately in problematic bullying situations. If students are usually protected by a paraprofessional, this learning is hindered. This becomes troublesome when situations arise where the students are on their own and a bullying scenario occurs. From the final theme, the paraprofessional as the primary teacher, the appropriateness and adequacy of instruction may be compromised when the paraprofessional functions in this role. Teacher responsibility may be absent, further promoting the segregation of students with disabilities from the teacher and consequently, peers.

The authors suggested that continued research is needed to explore the perspectives of students with differing disabilities including mild to moderate cognitive, behavioral, and developmental delays on the role and impact of paraprofessional support. The present study aims to expand the work of Broer et al. (2005) by interviewing students with low-incidence developmental disabilities such as autism and downs syndrome. In addition to expanding the research based upon population, the present study examines the perspectives of students while they are still involved in the educational system with paraprofessional supports.

Perspectives of Parents

While there is limited research on the effectiveness of paraprofessionals, there is even less that examines parent perspectives of the paraprofessional role and perceived impact for students with disabilities. In one of a handful of such studies, French and Chopra (1999) interviewed the mothers of children ages 3-21 who were in inclusive placements with a 1:1 paraprofessional. This qualitative study resulted in several relevant

themes relating to the role of the paraprofessional. The predominant theme to emerge was that of liaison between mothers and the school. A majority felt they had better personal relationships with the paraprofessional than they had with the teacher. In addition, mothers widely considered the aide their child's link to communication with other kids. They noted that it was the aide who took on the role of advocate for their child within the school, and expressed the belief that the aide increased the social status of the disabled child. In contrast, some parents felt that paraprofessionals "must learn to stand back" (French & Chopra, p.264). Clearly, the issue of potential dependency is evident. Similarly, Giangreco et al, (1997) reported that the close proximity of paraprofessionals hindered positive interactions between the child with disabilities and non-disabled peers.

The second theme was the paraprofessional as a team player with the teacher, parent and staff, in supporting the child with a disability. Thirdly, mothers viewed the paraprofessional to be synonymous to the role of instructor. In terms of academics, French and Chopra (1999) reported that mothers felt it was the aide that knew their child the best and therefore were most capable of assisting the teacher in planning appropriate instruction. Interestingly, all mothers involved in the study perceived the role of the paraprofessional as *necessary* and reported that the lack of training, pay, and full participation as a school member inhibited the usefulness of paraprofessionals. Overall, mothers were seen as having close relationships with their child's paraprofessional and it was widely perceived that it was the paraprofessional who assisted their child in participating more fully in the educational system.

In a similar recent study by Werts, Harris, Tillery, and Roark (2004), observations of paraprofessionals and students with disabilities were conducted in inclusive

classrooms. In addition, parents were interviewed regarding both their knowledge and perception of the paraprofessional working with their child. Overall, parents reported that they were pleased with their children's paraprofessional. In fact, 21 out of 28 described their child's paraprofessional positively. Analysis of interviews suggested that parents perceived the paraprofessionals as "teachers" who should be professionally valued. In terms of academic assistance, 19 out of the 28 parent participants reported that the paraprofessional was present to provide academic assistance. A main concern that was expressed by parents was the need for more training for paraprofessionals. In terms of child benefit, parents thought the paraprofessional provided necessary extra help to their child. Seven of the parents interviewed felt it was the presence of the paraprofessional that made inclusion possible for their child. Similar to French and Chopra (1999), Werts et al. reported that two thirds of the parents interviewed had received information regarding school directly from the paraprofessional. A key finding in the Werts et al. study is the perception of the necessity to provide paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities. All parents in the study opposed cutting the use of paraprofessionals in classrooms and believed the practice of inclusion could be promoted by hiring more paraprofessionals, along with the provision of their additional training.

A related area of research is the relationships that unfold between parents and paraprofessionals. Chopra and French (2004) conducted a qualitative study on the types of relationships that are formed between parents and paraprofessionals. Five types of self-explanatory relationships were revealed and include (1) close personal friends, (2) routine limited interactions, (3) routine extended interactions, (4) tense relationship, and (5) minimal relationship. This recent study confirmed that paraprofessionals and parents

communicate on a daily basis and that this interaction is often extensive. These researchers also reported that paraprofessional-parent and paraprofessional-student relationships were usually more beneficial when they were professional as opposed to personal. The importance of boundary training is evident.

Although the research in the area of parental perspectives of paraprofessional use is very limited, the results of the studies reviewed indicate that parents feel strongly about the need for extra support for their children with disabilities. Currently, support is being provided mainly by paraprofessionals who are highly valued by the parents of children with disabilities. Clearly, parent perceptions, as presented in the available literature may have had the adverse effect of fueling the so-called paraprofessional movement, despite the lack of efficacious studies.

Paraprofessional Perspectives

Paraprofessional employment is on the rise in school districts to meet the needs of both teachers and students (Doyle, 1997; French & Pickett, 1997). In fact, one type of support that general education teachers consider necessary is extra classroom assistance (Wolery et al. 1995). This demand for extra classroom support has left many paraprofessionals feeling as though they are assuming the primary burden of success for the included student (Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Many paraprofessionals perceive their role as working with students with disabilities so that the students are not a bother to the teacher and they work accordingly so the student does not disrupt the classroom. In many schools, the use of paraprofessionals appears to be the only means available for placing special education students who have challenging behaviors into inclusive education settings (Marks et al.). Another perception held by paraprofessionals

is that their role is to meet students' immediate academic needs which include tutoring and providing on the spot instructional modifications (Marks et al.). Interestingly, the areas of managing challenging behaviors and making curriculum adaptations are two primary areas in which paraprofessionals typically lack appropriate training (Riggs, 2001). In support of the notion of the evolution of the paraprofessional role from administrative to instructional, paraprofessionals studied by Marks et al. felt that they hold primary responsibility for the instruction of the disabled student.

In the Downing, Rydnak and Clark (2000) study, 16 paraprofessionals were interviewed using semi-structured methods. Those interviewed described their role as providing behavioral support, and instructional support relating to adapting and modifying curriculum. Paraprofessionals expressed dissatisfaction with the high level of responsibility they were given for the education of students with disabilities in disproportion to their lack of appropriate training. The disproportionate responsibility to training ratio was reiterated by Milner (1998), whereby teachers were observed to delegate responsibility for instruction of the disabled students to the paraprofessionals who felt their training was insufficient to assume such responsibilities.

The gap between the performed duties of paraprofessionals and their qualifications has raised serious question and concern regarding their utilization for students with disabilities. However, many proponents argue the advantages of paraprofessional use.

Advantages of Paraprofessional Involvement

Although there is a paucity of research on the topic of paraprofessional utilization, many authors consider paraprofessionals an important support for teachers (McNally,

Cole & Waugh, 2001; Welch, Richards, Okada, Richards, & Prescott, 1995). The guidance of an aide is seen as desirable to increase the academic output of students and the successful maintenance of the classroom (Loos, Williams & Bailey, 1977). In support of this view, several studies support their continued involvement for children with disabilities on the basis of the following: promoting positive student behaviors in class, increasing academic output, and facilitating a positive teacher/student relationship which are outlined subsequently (McNally et al.; Martella, Marchand-Martella, & Macfarlane, 1993; Werts, Zigmond, & Leeper, 1995).

Advantages

Promoting Positive Behaviors.

Students with disabilities may display behavioral characteristics such as inattention, disruption, and noncompliance. Due to the diversity of behavioral problems and time constraints of the classroom teacher, the paraprofessional often assumes the primary responsibility of managing the behavior of the student with special needs. Indeed, when requesting additional classroom support, teachers see an increased need for personal support as the level of disability of a target student increases (McNally et al., 2001). This may underscore the perception that the severity of a disability is directly correlated with the degree of time and support that a classroom teacher will need to expand on behavior related problems. Once granted, paraprofessional support can provide classroom management support for the teacher when their work promotes positive student behaviors in class. Martella, et al. (1993) found that paraprofessionals can acquire skills of appropriate commands and praise statements which helped to decrease student misbehavior and increase compliance to requests. The skills acquired were consistent

over time and continued to have positive effects on student classroom behavior related to compliance. Classroom management is a key factor in the learning environment and student behaviors are salient determinants of success in school. Clearly the contribution of the paraprofessional in aiding classroom management by providing extra support to the student with disabilities is invaluable to the classroom structure and success of the student.

Increasing Academic Output.

Academic engagement is comprised of attention, focus and on-task behavior. Promoting academic engagement facilitates academic success and thus, success in school. The presence of paraprofessionals in close proximity to students with disabilities has been shown to have positive effects on academic engagement. Results from the Werts et al. (1995) study indicated that students were academically engaged during a significantly higher number of intervals when a paraprofessional was positioned close to the student. In addition to promoting academic engagement, the paraprofessionals promoted positive social behaviors. It was found that when the students were more academically engaged (as a result of paraprofessional proximity), there was an increase in appropriate verbal interaction as opposed to physical, gestures or non-interactive behaviors which are deemed less appropriate. As further evidence that the use of paraprofessional supports for students with disabilities increases academic output and success in school, Gerber, Finn, Achilles, and Boyd-Zaharis (2001) found that when students were paired with aides for a period of two to three years consecutively, they did better in reading achievement measures than their aideless counterparts. Loos et al. (1977) examined paraprofessional use in open-style classrooms and found that compared to no-aide classrooms, differing

types of aides when introduced into classrooms, increased the class academic output and increased on-task behaviors; behavior that is essential to the academic output and management of a classroom. In summary, the presence of paraprofessionals seemingly promotes both positive student behaviors and academic output of students with disabilities.

Facilitation of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships.

In addition to promoting positive student behaviors and academic output, it has been argued that paraprofessionals facilitate positive student/teacher interactions. The teacher-student relationship can affect a child's social status within the classroom and therefore can have an effect on facilitating positive interactions between the student with disabilities and their typical peers (Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003). The promotion of positive student-teacher interactions via the paraprofessional thus can influence the relationship and in turn facilitate positive peer interactions. Promotion of positive peer interactions is crucial for students with disabilities to be successful socially in both inclusive and special education settings. Moreover, the presence of a paraprofessional does not necessarily negatively affect the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Robertson et al., 2003). In fact, Robertson et al. found that a majority of teachers noted that the paraprofessional helped them develop a better relationship with students with autism specifically.

The presence of paraprofessionals seems to provide positive effects on the social and academic life of students with disabilities. Through the use of prompts, paraprofessionals can facilitate an increase in children's skills and can promote the independent engagement of these skills (Hall, McClannahan & Krantz, 1995). This

includes promoting positive behaviors, increasing academic output, and improving the teacher-student relationship. These factors may promote the continued use of paraprofessionals in classrooms with students with disabilities. Despite the advantages discussed above, many researchers have started to question what the potential disadvantages and drawbacks of paraprofessional use are. The concerns are due largely to the minimal amount of studies which have been designed to measure the efficacy of paraprofessional use (Jones & Bender, 1993).

Drawbacks of Paraprofessional Use

The use of prompts is one of the primary mechanisms by which paraprofessionals support students with disabilities. Nevertheless, the reduction of prompts is critical if students with disabilities are to independently engage in classroom activities. The use of prompts can require close proximity to the student and thus may have an intrusion effect. Thus, the primary mechanism for supporting students with disabilities ironically becomes its biggest deterrent. Those who argue against the use of paraprofessionals do so most strongly on the basis of the following: the impact of prompts on promoting dependency, the effect of proximity on the segregation of the student from their teacher and peers and the lack of influence of academic success.

Drawbacks

Promotion of Dependency.

The primary role of paraprofessionals is to provide support and assistance to students with disabilities. This role, and the tasks defined under the role, do not appear to make a difference whether the paraprofessionals are employed in regular classrooms or in special education classrooms (Hall et al., 1995). In a large scale 1997 study on

paraprofessional proximity, it was found that almost universally, it was the instructional assistants who were given the responsibility and ownership for educating students with disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997). Given these findings, it is apparent why paraprofessionals may be hesitant to reduce their interactions with students. However, as a behavioral support, the use of prompting hierarchies is contingent upon fading prompts as soon as possible to promote independence and avoid dependency. There is little evidence of paraprofessionals fading prompts to decrease dependency and to encourage students to respond to others, including the classroom teacher and peers (Giangreco et al). Giangreco et al. observed that students with disabilities waited for prompts from paraprofessionals even if they were capable of executing the task independently. Given the importance of fading prompts, these findings are problematic and implicate that further training regarding prompting is required of paraprofessionals. Proper training can result in a low level of prompts by paraprofessionals and higher percentages of independent engagement by students with disabilities. However, this type of pre-service or in-service training is not readily available to paraprofessionals (Hall et al.).

Segregation of the Student.

In the execution of prompting, concerns of paraprofessional proximity increase. Students and one-on-one paraprofessionals are often seen as a package deal by other students in the class and when instructional assistants are not well-liked by classroom peers, it can have a negative impact on the disabled students' social engagement (Giangreco et al., 1997). In a study by Giangreco et al. it was noted that at times when the paraprofessionals were not in close proximity to the students with disabilities, peers were

more likely to occupy the space. The more often students with disabilities are in close contact with their peers, the more likely interactions can take place. The researchers observed that non-disabled peers were more likely to leave groups that had a paraprofessional attached to them rather than participate. Thus, when paraprofessionals maintain a close proximity to students with disabilities, they may be deterring social interaction and separating the student from the class. Ancillary to this, paraprofessionals have been found to regularly separate students with disabilities from the rest of the class further adding to the segregation of the students (Giangreco et al.).

As noted earlier, the level of engagement the teacher has with the students with disabilities has been shown as a key factor in affecting the success of a student. Although it was argued that paraprofessionals can have a positive effect on teacher-student engagement, the model of paraprofessional delivery plays an important role. It has been argued that the most effective paraprofessionals support groups of pupils rather than individuals (Lacey, 2001), and the one-on-one model can have adverse effects. For instance, Young, Simpson, Myles and Kamps (1997) reported that teacher-initiated interactions with three students with autism were infrequent given the close proximity of a paraprofessional. In addition, Giangreco et al. (1997) stated that the assignment of paraprofessionals in close proximity to students with disabilities interfered with the classroom teachers' sense of ownership and shared responsibility for educating the student with special needs.

Adding to these findings, Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman, (2001) determined that classroom teachers were more engaged with students with disabilities when those students were facilitated by program-based paraprofessionals who supported the

educational needs of students with and without disabilities. Conversely, less engagement was found for students who were supported by one-on-one aides. Given that we know teacher-student relationships are a key factor in the educational success of students with disabilities, these findings bring into question the use of one-on-one paraprofessionals. Many researchers are critical of the automatic assignment of an aide to an included child due to these concerns (Giangreco et al., 1999; Shukla, Kennedy, & Cushing, 1999; Marks et al., 1999). Promotion of dependency and segregation deter the success of students with disabilities both socially, by isolating the student from his or her peers and classroom teacher and academically, by decreasing the possibility for independent academic engagement. These factors directly contradict the goals of inclusion.

Academic Contributions.

In addition to decreasing the possibility of independent academic engagement, large-scale studies examining the academic achievement of students with disabilities found no differences between the average performance of students in teacher aide classes versus students in classes without aides on a variety of tests (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001). These findings illustrate that there is a major flaw in the delivery of paraprofessional service to promote academic success. Therefore, whether the primary function of paraprofessionals is to enhance academic performance or to foster social relationships, there exists an obvious ineffective use of paraprofessionals in the educational system. Increased use of paraprofessionals in the educational system to support students with disabilities coupled with the manifest concerns of ineffectiveness make it imperative to identify and put in place supports to remedy the current system of paraprofessional use. The issue is clearly described by Brown et al. (1999):

> The quality of education a student with disabilities receives should not be dependent on the effectiveness of those who have the lowest status and the least training of any professional in the school system. Service delivery models that are overly dependent on paraprofessionals seriously compromise consistent access to excellent instruction (p. 252).

Summary

A review of the education literature over the past two decades affirms there is a lack of research on the efficacy of paraprofessional use for enhancing outcomes for students with disabilities (Jones & Bender, 1993; Giangreco et al. 2001); yet, their use in the educational system continues to flourish. The utilization of paraprofessionals in classes to assist students with disabilities lacks systematic planning and execution which may thus lead to issues of dependency, segregation, and questionable effect on the academic achievement of the students. The role of the paraprofessional needs to be modeled around proven empirical practices. There is enough information on the potential adverse effects of paraprofessional supports to warrant further investigation. While it is without doubt that paraprofessionals have a positive impact on the lives of students with disabilities, it is unknown how much of a differential exists between advantages and disadvantages of paraprofessional use.

Surprisingly, students with disabilities have yet to be questioned on how they think paraprofessional supports affect their academic, social, and personal outcomes. This is a critical and essential step to promote the self-determination of students with disabilities and for researchers and administrators alike to understand how students themselves perceive paraprofessional support. Current trends suggest that students with disabilities who receive such supports are likely to access such supports throughout their education. Studying their perceptions, along with expanding the research on parental and

paraprofessional perceptions from a Canadian perspective, may offer opportunities to modify paraprofessional supports to be of more benefit while the students are still in school. Thus, the purposes of this study were (a) to describe students with disabilities perspectives of the role and impact of having a paraprofessional in their classroom and inclusive education setting and (b) compare their perspectives with the perception of both parents and paraprofessionals on paraprofessional support. Categories of responses will be highlighted and implications of findings for practical applications will be discussed.

Chapter III

Methodology and Methods

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge and understanding of the role and impact of paraprofessional supports through participants' voices. Basic interpretive qualitative inquiry forms the style of investigation, and consequently, the methods used and the nature of the interpretation. Critical components of this research paradigm will be discussed.

Assumptions

In the execution of basic interpretive qualitative research it is necessary for the researcher to indicate assumptions that guide a particular study. In the current study, data was collected with the postulation that meaning is socially constructed and that multiple interpretations of the same reality exist. In this research, it was assumed that all participants were able to articulate truthfully their own realities to the researcher. A potential limitation is the possibility that student respondents were unable to comprehend fully interview questions as a result of their disability. To combat this limitation, questions were related as much as possible to specific activities and situations as research has shown this type of questioning to be more easily understood by persons' with disabilities (Finlay & Lyons, 2001). As such, it is assumed that participants comprehended and answered questions candidly.

Methodology

The methodology underlying this research is Basic Interpretive Qualitative Inquiry. This style of qualitative research, sometimes termed, generic or basic qualitative inquiry,

has the objective of being able to "simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p.11, Merriam, 1998). Basic interpretive studies have their foundation in components of phenomenology, constructivism, and symbolic interactionism (Merriam, 2002). Phenomenology proposes that the experiences of individuals are interpreted from the meaning they hold. Constructivism presupposes that meaning is not discovered; rather it is constructed and interpreted by people as they interact with the world. Symbolic interactionism focuses on individuals' experiences and interactions with others in society and the construction of meaning as a result of those interactions.

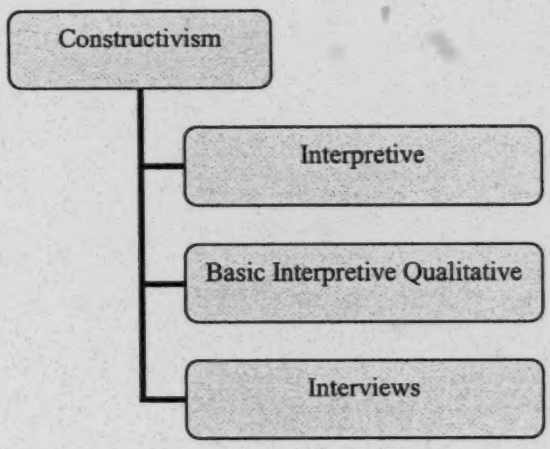
Basic interpretive research differs from other qualitative traditions as the others have additional purposes aside from understanding how people make meaning from their experiences (Merriam et al., 2002). In this type of research, there is no attempt made to build a theory or examine the essence of the lived experience, as in grounded theory and phenomenology, respectively (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Yet, as with most qualitative research, this study has a central aim of developing knowledge, and has its basis in the epistemology of the constructivist philosophy whereby humans construct knowledge of their experiences on a somewhat subjective level (Caelli et al).

The theoretical stance of this study is interpretivism in which information is interpreted and re-interpreted by both researcher and participants. Interpretivism assumes that there are multiple realities, not single realities of phenomena, and that these realities can differ across time and place. It is through qualitative methodologies that the researcher, as the research instrument, is able to inductively explore individual

perceptions and experiences certain individuals or groups of individuals have in a particular context at a particular time (Merriam et al, 2002).

Due to the subjective nature of human knowledge, the preeminent way to acquire data is often through interview, observation, or document analysis methods. The research design is guided by the following questions: (1) According to students with disabilities in inclusive education settings, what is the role and impact of having paraprofessional supports? And (2) How do the perceptions of students compare to parents/guardians and paraprofessionals perspectives on the role and impact of paraprofessional supports? Given the specific questions and purposes of this research study, interviews were perceived to be the best means for data collection. Bracketing refers to the close examination of the researcher's own biases to the phenomenon and, "allows the experience of the phenomenon to be explained in terms of its own intrinsic system of meaning, not one imposed on it from without" (Merriam, 2002, p. 94). Interviewing participants, while bracketing personal presumptions about the topic, will allow the "data to speak for itself" allowing for documentation, exploration, and interpretation of the lived experiences of paraprofessional support (Merriam, 2002). Figure 1 (based on Crotty, 1998) displays the flow of elements that inform one another in this research.

*Figure 1.*Qualitative Flow of Elements



Methods

Sample

As qualitative researchers, we are not interested in the frequency and extent of a particular phenomenon, and therefore random sampling does not adequately meet the purposes of this research (Merriam et al, 2002). Instead, this study employs purposive sampling, which is ideal for this project as there is the presupposition that the researcher aims to discover, comprehend, and gain knowledge of experiences from a knowledgeable set of participants. According to Merriam et al. (2002) it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. As qualitative researchers, we are urged to establish essential criteria for choosing whom to include in interviews (Merriam).

A purposive sample of two student participants (target subjects) from each of four age groups (3-6 years, 7-12 years, 13-17 years, and 18-30 years) was selected from the larger study sample. All participants were assigned to an educational assistant. Student participants that could best communicate their experience about EA supports were

considered first priority. From the target subject sample, respective parent and educational assistants were added to the analysis to form triads. Participant recruitment was conducted as part of the larger "Inclusion across the lifespan" project (Timmons & Lupart, 2004). Recruitment consisted of contacting school boards and advocacy groups/agencies in Alberta. All agencies were contacted via telephone inquiry. Consent from the urban school boards was received through the cooperative activities ethics review at the University of Alberta, whereas rural school boards were contacted directly by telephone. Families interested in participating were contacted through a mail out which was assisted by cooperating schools and agencies. For underage participants, a consent form was sent to their parents/guardians prior to initiating participation in the study. In addition, teachers/employers were sent a consent form requesting an interview following the initial family volunteer process.

From this initial recruitment, the purposive sample resulted in a student sample of eight children aged 6-18. Of the eight target subjects, three had autism, two had broadly diagnosed developmental delays, one had a brain injury, one had downs syndrome and one had Prader-Willi Syndrome. All developmental diagnoses were acquired through parental report. Half of the student sample attended schools in rural Alberta communities, while the other half attended urban community schools. Archived data from 24 participants, consisting of eight student/parent/paraprofessional triads was included in this study. All parents interviewed were the mothers of the target subjects. In addition, all of the paraprofessionals in the sample were female. Data from approximately two to three archived interviews per participant was utilized for analysis. Informed consent from all

applicable parties was obtained through the "Inclusion across the lifespan" project (Appendix A).

Data Collection

From the larger "Inclusion across the Lifespan" project, selected initial participant interviews provided the framework for the development of additional interview protocols focused on the topic of the role of the paraprofessionals in the school environment. Semi-structured interview questions were developed prior to follow-up interviews and each participant was asked the same set of questions, with some slight variation between target subjects, parent and paraprofessional participants based on relevance (see Appendix B). Each interview was conducted in the family home for parents and target subjects, and at the respective schools of paraprofessional participants. The interviews ranged in time from 15 minutes to two hours. Open-ended questions were used to allow each participant the freedom to express his/her experiences, subjectivities, pre-understandings, concerns, and opinions (Seidman, 1991). Yet, at times, questions were asked in a more direct manner depending on the needs and comprehension level of the individuals involved. Vocabulary level of the student with disabilities was taken into consideration during interviews. In order to avoid influencing the direction of answers, care was taken to not ask leading questions (Seidman). Interview guides utilized in the "Inclusion across the Lifespan" project were formulated by a team of researchers based upon important aspects of previous research (Giangreco et al., 2001). All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Since tape recorded interviews is one of the most efficient ways to collect data, these means allow the researcher to compare responses among participants and within the context of the target subject, parent and EA triads.

Data Analysis

Analysis of archived data was initially conducted on a case-by-case basis. Individual interview transcripts were coded and then analyzed for identification of relevant themes. Common themes and trends were investigated and analyzed for comparison between and within the triads. Using connotative coding, meanings within each transcript were grouped together into the common themes (Bereska, 2003). Three phases of coding were utilized in order to uncover valid themes; open coding, axial coding, and theme identification (Neunann, 1991, as cited in Bereska). Initially, codes were determined broadly; a method labeled open coding. In the next phase of axial coding, codes were refined, and made more specific. In the final coding phase, codes were expanded and developed into specific categories or themes.

The construction of themes can help to create a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1997). Determination of themes can be described as a five step process which requires the researcher to: (1) identify the pieces of the pattern, (2) combine related patterns into meaningful units, (3) identify sub themes and determine how they relate to patterns and themes, (4) synthesize several themes to obtain a broad, comprehensive, and holistic view of the data, and (5) formulate theme statements (Leininger 1985). The analysis of themes or thematic analysis "involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend throughout an entire interview or set of interviews" (Morse & Field, 1995, p.139). Themes were examined using the coding approach described above with the NUDIST 6 (N6) qualitative data analysis package. Data in qualitative research is often capacious and complex, making managing and coding the data quite difficult (Marshall, 2002). NUDIST technology allows for a more

simple process of computer assisted document indexing and categorizing (Richards & Richards, 1994). Despite having the assistance of technology to manage data, it is the researcher's responsibility to uncover themes that are "beneath the surface" and make them overt for the reader (Morse et al., 2002). It is through pattern examination of small units of verbal interviews that themes were derived (Morse & Field, 1995). Subsequently, transcripts were compared for common themes (Merriam, 2002). An amalgamation of common codes emerged across participants with each code being given a short descriptor that best exemplified a particular category. Discrepancies found between core themes prompted the researcher to revisit and revise the analysis (Morse and Field, 1995).

Study Rigor and Trustworthiness

In qualitative inquiry, rigor refers to the extent that researchers' findings are trustworthy and believable. The use of audit trails, member checks, and triangulation are tools that qualitative researchers utilize to assist in the assurance of trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there are four criteria considered necessary to ensure trustworthiness. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, all of which are currently widely accepted today amongst qualitative researchers. In my research, all four criteria were considered to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. Credibility involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Credibility is comparable to "internal validity" in conventional criteria. It relates to how the researcher's reconstruction of the data fits the realities and views the participants express during data collection. The use of member checks, triangulation, peer review and sufficient data is often utilized to establish the legitimacy of participant data. In the

current research, member checks were not utilized because the results were synthesized, decontextualized, and abstracted across participants and thus specific case story member checks were not necessary (Morse et al., 2002). Instead, triangulation, peer review and sufficient data collection were utilized to enhance credibility. The use of triangulated data in the form of triads adds to the credibility and truthfulness of the findings. Triangulation refers to looking at an "object" or phenomena from more than one standpoint. Biases inherent through the use of a specific research method are reduced through triangulation, allowing for greater confidence in interpretations. Cross-coding via peer review by another researcher was utilized for all protocols to analyze the materials and establish reliability within the coding structure.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. In qualitative research, it is the reader who determines whether or not the results can be transferred to his/her situation based on how close his/her situation matches the one described in the study. According to Lincoln and Guba, (1985) "if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere" (p. 298). It is through detailed and rich description that sufficient information is provided to enable readers to judge the applicability of findings to other settings (Seale 2002). Merriam (2002) termed this process reader generalizability.

Dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the changing context within which research occurs. Replicability in qualitative research, as defined in conventional quantitative terms, is not viable given the flexibility of the research design and reflexivity of the researcher. Rather, the researcher is responsible for describing the

changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the researcher approached the study. The use of an audit trail assists in the assurance of dependability and confirmability. An audit trail is a research record of steps taken, decisions made, and the rationales for them. The audit trail entailed recorded interviews on disk, interview transcripts, interview guides, lists of interviewees, lists of categories and hypotheses the researcher used while analyzing the data, and notes about research procedure, methods, and methodology.

Finally, confirmability refers to the degree to which results can be corroborated by others. An audit trail helps to ensure investigator responsiveness in which the researcher relinquishes ideas that are poorly supported. In the execution of data analysis, an audit trail was completed by the researcher.

In addition to Guba and Lincoln's (1985) criteria, data representativeness is a critical component of study rigor. Data representativeness refers to the extent to which the data is able to describe a particular experience within a particular context. Articulation of results necessitates the use of rich, thick description and is essential in demonstrating the trustworthiness and representativeness of the data. In order to establish greater trustworthiness of data gained through rich, thick description, the researcher needs to ensure that the sample chosen is the most appropriate (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). As previously discussed, sampling criteria were established in order to achieve the most appropriate sample. In a later chapter, articulation of results will involve rich, thick description from the "raw data".

Ethical Considerations

Initial participant recruitment was executed as part of the "Inclusion across the Lifespan" project (Timmons & Lupart, 2004). Letters of consent and information were provided to each participant and parent/guardians where applicable (See appendix C). Participants were informed of their freedom to discontinue participation at any time during the course of the study. In addition, it was explained that informed consent was an ongoing process of collaboration between researcher and participant. In instances where informed consent was obtained by parents/guardians for minor or dependent participants, assent was obtained from the participants. Individuals with disabilities may be under the legal guardianship of another person therefore the guardian has the legal right to consent for the individual to participate in the study. This may result in both minors and individuals with disabilities being volunteered by their parents/guardians to participate, without a full understanding of what participation entails. A volunteered individual may be unaware of any possible risks of the research or their rights as a research participant. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the individuals with disabilities are participating of their own autonomy. Verbal communication between the researcher and the participants to obtain assent is a critical component of research with minors and individuals with disabilities. Confidentiality was explained to all participants and only investigators, research assistants and transcribers were given access to audiotapes and transcripts with all confidential information being filed in a locked office. In the discussion of results, participants are denoted by age and gender to ensure confidentiality.

Chapter IV

Results

Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of student (target subjects), parent and paraprofessional (educational assistants) interviews are presented in this chapter. As noted in Chapter one, the terms paraprofessional and educational assistant have been used interchangeably within the literature. Within the educational community however, the term educational assistant is used predominately and therefore will be used as an alternative to paraprofessional within the remaining chapters. Thematic analysis resulted in five analogous overarching themes for each participant group on the topic of educational assistant role and impact. Within these primary themes, sub-themes surfaced which differed depending upon the respondent group and within sub-themes, sub-categories were evident. Themes and sub-themes (including sub-categories) will be discussed first for students, followed by parents, and concluded with educational assistants (EAs). Specifically, intra-group themes will be discussed and inter-group similarities and differences will be presented. Target subjects will be identified by age and gender in examples provided. Conversely, parents and EAs will not be individually identified; rather examples will be presented within their participant group as distinguishing information lacks relevance. Within the text, bracketed information will denote researcher substitution to ensure anonymity. Participant names or identifying information will be replaced with appropriate substitutions, such as [the student], within quotes.

Basic Interpretive Themes

From the coded data, five overarching themes emerged. The five primary themes are: (1) EA Impact on Peer Interactions, (2) EA Impact on Student Autonomy, (3) Educational Assistant Attributes, (4) EA Impact on Teacher Role, and (5) EA Impact on School Inclusion. The theme EA Impact on Peer Interactions is comprised of various aspects of EA supports which influence the socialization of students with disabilities. Included within this theme are aspects of the EA role which contribute to the enhancement or diminishment of peer interactions. Secondly, EA Impact on Student Autonomy as a theme is largely based upon the extent to which independence is promoted or deterred by EA supports, along with mitigating variables which may influence student self-determination. The third theme consists of Educational Assistant Attributes. Positive and negative aspects of EA work with students with disabilities were examined and are largely exemplified through participant responses of likes and dislikes of EA supports. Fourthly, EA Impact on Teacher Role can be understood as the mechanism by which actions and activities of educational assistants can fail to support and potentially hinder the roles and responsibilities of general educators. The final emergent theme is EA Impact on School Inclusion. This theme consists of the ways in which students with disabilities are engaged with and included within their school setting as a function of EA supports.

For purposes of clarity, a summary of the five themes and prominent sub-themes is provided in Figure 2. Sub-themes were not consistent across participant groups and an X indicates the presence of a sub-theme while a dash indicates absence of a sub-theme for a particular group; in depth description and examples of each follow subsequently. To further clarify, within the following text themes within text will be denoted in bold.

Alternatively, sub-themes will be italicized throughout theme sections as appropriate for enhancing clarity.

Figure 2. Summary of Themes from Basic Interpretive Inquiry

	Target Subjects	Parents	EAs
EA IMPACT ON PEER INTERACTIONS			
EA strategies	X	X	X
EA necessity: Socialization	X	X	X
Extent of engagement	X	X	X
Peer perceptions	X	--	--
EA IMPACT ON STUDENT AUTONOMY			
Student Independence	X	X	X
Dependency	--	X	X
EA Necessity	X	X	X
EA Proximity	X	--	--
EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT ATTRIBUTES			
Likes and dislikes	X	X	X
EA role/ importance	X	X	X
Emotional Impact	--	--	X
EA IMPACT ON TEACHER ROLE			
Time spent	X	X	--
Learning	X	X	X
EA ownership	--	X	X
EA relationships	--	--	X
EA IMPACT ON SCHOOL INCLUSION			
Challenges	--	X	--
Type of assistance	X	--	--
Proximity	--	X	X
Group involvement	X	--	--
Solo activities	X	X	X
Facilitation of inclusion	--	X	X

Analysis of Student Interview Data

Theme One: EA Impact on Peer Interactions

This theme exemplifies how the role/actions of educational assistants impact how often and in what ways students with disabilities interact with their peers at school. Student answers to interview questions regarding EA supports resulted in four sub-themes concerning the **EA impact on peer interactions**. Initially, the *strategies* used by educational assistants to assist in peer socialization were explored.

i. EA strategies. Of the eight student participants, two noted that they did not receive support for making or maintaining friendships. Of the participants who did receive support, the *strategies* consisted of educating peers about the student with a disability or educating the student on appropriate socialization. Educating peers involved references to specific disabilities as demonstrated in the following.

> Target subject (TS): [My educational assistant] helped me a lot adjusting to a new school and teaching my classmates about me and about autism" (Male 18 years).

Alternatively, educating the student with a disability involved assisting the student in making appropriate friendship choices.

> Researcher (R): How does she help you learn to make friends?
>
> Target subject (TS): Because she told me not to play with bullies. She said don't go around those bullies, like walk in and find somebody else to play with (Male 9 years).

The different processes of educating ultimately have the same goal; peer socialization and acceptance. In addition to *strategies* utilized by the EA to assist in this goal, attitudes of other children towards the EA may impact the extent of student socialization. These attitudes emerged as a sub-theme.

ii. Peer perceptions. In addition to assistance with social interaction, *peer perceptions* of the EA as either positive or negative were also uncovered. The way in which peers viewed a student's individual EA can have implications for their social acceptance. A majority of participants felt that the EA was viewed positively by peers, indicating a greater possibility for social inclusion. A typical positive response is demonstrated in the following quote.

> R: And do the other kids like [the educational assistant] too?
>
> TS: Yes.
>
> R: And why do they like her?
>
> TS: Because she's my best helper (Male 10 years).

However, some negative *peer perceptions* were also uncovered and are indicative of the potential result of a disliked EA. An exemplar of this is illustrated below.

> TS: I did not like her and my friends did not like her [educational assistant]. My friends didn't hang around with me as much that year because of her (Male 18 years).

The extent to which the likeability of one adult can impact socialization is an important consideration for EA supports. In addition to *peer perceptions*, the extent to which an EA engages with a student, in terms of time spent, influences socialization and was revealed as the third sub-theme within this study.

iii. Extent of engagement. The third sub-theme relates to the amount of time that the participant felt they engaged with the educational assistant when compared to time spent with peers. Of the eight participants, three reported that they spent the majority of their time at school with the EA. Alternatively, two felt they spent more time engaging with their peers, while another two felt equal time was spent with both the EA and their

peers. One student did not specify the amount of time spent with either EA or peers. In terms of time spent, educational assistant presence at breaks and/or recess was also discussed. Two students reported that their EA was not present at breaks, one was unspecified, and five reported EA presence during school breaks, with the inclusion of lunch and class transition time. Of the five who reported that the EA was in proximity during these times, three wanted them there, while the other two preferred they not be present. The latter preference is demonstrated here:

> R: So when you're playing with your friends inside of the school, is [the EA] there with you guys?
>
> TS: Yes.
>
> R: Do you want [the EA] there when you're playing with your other friends?
>
> TS: No, cause I'm big enough (Female 13 years).

Students who did report wanting the EA present during breaks stated support reasons for this preference as illustrated below.

> R: What kind of things does she help you with?
>
> TS: Like going on the monkey bars sometimes (Male 9 years).

The support offered by educational assistants to students discussed here leads into the fourth sub-theme, which is whether or not students view EA supports for socialization as necessary and the reasons for perceived necessity.

iv. EA necessity: Socialization. Three participants felt it was necessary to have an EA help them interact with peers primarily to help them focus and for protection.

> R: Do you need [your EA] to play appropriately with your friends?
>
> TS: Yes sometimes to help me stay focused. Sometimes I want to play different than the rules so I needed help to not do that (Male 18 years).

Conversely, four students felt that they did not require assistance from the EA to interact with their peers. Only one participant did not comment on EA necessity for socialization. The ways and extent to which EAs foster or deter socialization of students with disabilities are evident within the sub-themes discussed. Further thematic examination of interview data involved student individuality and **autonomy**; which follows as the second dominant theme.

Theme two: EA Impact on Student Autonomy

Three common sub-themes were uncovered which related directly to student self-determination and personal control; the first of which relates to *independence* in activities and answering questions.

i. Student independence. The research revealed various levels of EA involvement in student questions or activities as follows: guided by the EA, lead by the EA, or the student was independent. In guided or lead activities, some students reported that they were capable of executing the task/activity independently. A situation in which students were assisted by the EA but they felt competent to be independent is demonstrated in the following example.

> R: Is there anything that she helps you with that you think you could do by yourself?
>
> TS: Foods I could do by myself, phys-ed, and industrial arts.
>
> R: Ok and she's there with you through all those classes?
>
> TS: Yes (Male 17 years).

Receiving unnecessary support can impact a student's sense of self-competence and ultimately their self-esteem. Being assisted in situations where one has been, or could be

independent can result in negative feelings towards self or towards the EA. The latter is demonstrated here:

> TS: [Educational assistant] always did things for me, things I had done by myself before. At first it was fun so I did not have to work, but then I realized she didn't think I could and then I got mad at her (Male 18 years, speaking of past EA).

Alternatively, some participants reported that they felt their EA allowed independence where appropriate.

> TS: My [EA] always expected me to do my own work (Male 18 years).

Directly relating to *independence* and **autonomy** was the sub-theme of EA *proximity* to the student throughout the school day.

ii. EA proximity. When responding to questions relating to EA *proximity*, participants reported on their preferences for distance between themselves and their EA, their feelings regarding EA proximity, and finally, where the EA was situated in relation to the student. In this regard, "beside" was defined as directly in front of, behind, to the right of, or left of the student. Examples of perceptions follow:

> R: Can you tell me why you like it when she's closer?
>
> TS: Cause then we can sit by each other and help each other (Female 13 years).

Four preferred the EA to be in close proximity. One preferred the EA to be close some of the time but to give him space when needed. One did not specify, and the final two preferred to be given some space from the EA as demonstrated below.

> TS: Sometimes just a little bit of a distance.
>
> R: Why?
>
> TS: So I can have my space (Male 17 years).

The desire for EA closeness or distance is likely correlated with the extent to which students felt they were capable of being independent in their inclusive setting. Desire for space or closeness is potentially indicative of student perceptions of their own capabilities, and may be closely related to the following sub-theme of *EA necessity.*

iii. EA necessity. The final sub-theme to emerge within **student autonomy** was the perception that EA assistance was needed and that the students could not function in the inclusive setting by themselves. Of the eight participants, seven felt that EA assistance was necessary and only one did not believe this to be so. The main reasons and specific needs for reporting this *necessity* fell into two sub-categories: (1) inclusion/social support and (2) academic assistance. Social support and academic needs are illustrated below respectively.

Example 1:

> TS: Without them I could never have been in a regular class. I would have been in a place away from my friends – I would not have the friends I have (Male 18 years).

Example 2:

> TS: She's a good teacher's aide. She has been helping me for numerous years and she does a good job.
>
> R: And what do you need her for?
>
> TS: I just need her for core subjects like social and L.A. Even though I don't like to do math and science (Male 17 years).

Perceptions of *necessity* for support are illustrative of the degree to which students operate as autonomous beings within the educational system. In addition to **impact on autonomy**, **attributes of EAs** was uncovered as a third theme.

Theme three: Educational Assistant Attributes

Within this theme, several sub-themes surfaced. Students discussed their *likes and dislikes* of EA support, and how having an EA made them feel. They discussed the importance of EA work to them and defined what they felt was their *educational assistant's role*. In addition, they discussed the specific assistance they received from their respective EAs. These sub-themes will be discussed with the inclusion of specific sub-categories found within each.

i. Likes and dislikes. When students were asked what they *liked* about their EA, their answers fell into two main sub-categories; EA personality and EA assistance. Personality related responses included general responses such as "she is nice", and that having them around makes them "feel good". One participant responded that having an EA made her feel "pretty special". Positive views of EAs related predominantly to academics. Examples are demonstrated next.

Example 1:

> TS: I like it that she helps me out with stuff I don't understand. She puts it into simple form. A lot of things like…it makes me feel good that I have someone who helps me out. That I have a person that I make sure that I'm always on task, not falling behind in class. (Male 17 years).

Example 2:

> TS: Sometime she writes stuff down for me because I'm as slow as a tortoise and my friends are as fast as rabbits (Male 10 years).

Example 3:

> R: You think it's special to have someone there helping you?
>
> TS: Yes.
>
> R: Can you tell me why?
>
> TS: Because it's great for my brain and [the EA] helps me very well (Female 13 years).

Students were also asked if there was anything they did not like about having an EA. Two sub-categories of response for *dislikes* were evident and included (1) feeling different, and (2) the occurrence of misunderstandings. Example quotes are respectively given below.

Example 1:

> TS: It was hard always having someone with me in junior high and high school. It made me different that the other kids. I always had to do my work – other kids got to skip school and slack off and I couldn't (Male 18 years).

Example 2:

> TS: Sometimes there's confusing things that I don't understand and sometimes….I don't know. Maybe she jumps to conclusions a bit too fast.
>
> R: Can you give me an example?
>
> TS: Like one time I was having difficulty with thinking about my dad. And she just jumped to conclusions and just sent me to the office (Male 17 years).

In order to investigate the potential impact of EA supports, participants were asked questions about their own perception of what the job of an EA entails and why it is important. The way in which a student views the *EA's role* can have significant implications for the potential impact of that role on the student.

ii. EA role. When asked to define what the educational assistant's job is, responses fell into four main sub-categories including (1) academic assistance, (2) administrative work, (3) social assistance and (4) classroom assistant. Administrative duties included photocopying and phone calls, academic assistance related such things as "nagging on me until I work", social assistance referred to "making the right choices", and classroom assistant was described as "helping all the other kids". In addition to defining job roles, students discussed the specific assistance that they received from their respective EAs.

Assistance was viewed as either behavioral support or as academic support. Behavioral support often related to regulating mood and assisting the student in remaining calm. An example follows:

> R: Yes, is there anything that she does for you?
>
> TS: She helps me if my mood is not right, like balanced enough.
>
> R: And how does she help you with that?
>
> TS: She helps me calm down and she talks it over with me, should I be doing this (Male 17 years).

Alternatively, many participants perceived the support they received to be academic in nature; predominantly with assistance in learning.

> TS: She helps me make sure I have everything before I leave home with my agendas, like if I have homework, I always take it with me (Female 13 years).
>
> R: What is the most important thing that [the EA] does with you? What do you think it is?
>
> TS: I'd say reading (Male 6 years).

As a result of their specialized education and training, academic support is generally viewed as the responsibility of teachers. However, responses indicate that EAs are taking a significant part of this responsibility. Thus, the responsibilities of teachers are altered.

Theme four: EA Impact on Teacher Role

The fourth overarching theme to be uncovered was the impact of EA supports on the role of teachers in the classrooms. Within this theme, two sub-themes were uncovered: *time spent* with the EA versus the teacher and *learning*. This latter sub-theme included learning strategies used by the EA, learning strategies used by the teacher, and student perception of from whom they learned best.

i. Time spent. Of the eight participants, five felt that they spent more time with their EA at school than they did with their teacher. Only one felt they spent more time with the teacher, while two felt time was spent equally with both. Similarly, five individuals felt they learned the most academically from the EA, two from the teacher and one felt that an equal amount was learned from both.

ii. Learning. Learning strategies utilized by the EA to assist in knowledge acquisition were general activities such as "helping me remember" and "put things into simple form". Alternatively, teacher strategies included things like "explaining" and "telling us what to do". The articulation of specific learning strategies was difficult for all participants.

Theme five: EA Impact on School Inclusion

The final theme to emerge from the data was the impact of EA support on inclusion in the school. Within this theme, three primary sub-themes were related to inclusion. Initially, the *type of assistance* perceived, whether classroom or individual, was seen as an important factor under **school inclusion**.

i. Type of assistance. Three students felt the EA was there for them alone, while four viewed the EA as part of the classroom. One student did not specify *type of assistance*. The nature of EA supports often encompasses one-to-one activities which have the potential to negate classroom inclusion.

ii. Solo activities. Separation from the class or group activities constitutes *solo activities*. Separation from such activities may negate the goals of inclusion and thus examining reasons for separation is important. Predominantly, students engaged in *solo*

special activities with the EA outside of the classroom for "breaks" or for behavioral support as described below.

> TS: Sometimes in Jr. High and High School I would need to write out how I was feeling if I got upset or something so we would go to the library (Male 18 years).

iii. Group involvement. Participants were asked about their involvement in school groups. *Group involvement* may be viewed as an illustration of inclusion in the school. In the current study, only two students were involved in a school group, one of which was accompanied by the EA.

This completes the findings from analysis of target subject interview data. The following section will examine parental views of impact to determine similarities and discrepancies among perceptions.

Analysis of Parent Interview Data

The five overarching themes for parents are the same as those found for students. Sub-themes and sub-categories however differed to some extent. In addition to having different perceptions, students' inability to articulate responses may account for some differences. Definitions and general content associated with each theme as described in the previous student section are equivalent for parent and EA groups and therefore, for purposes of simplicity and brevity, they will not be described for a second time.

Theme one: EA Impact on Peer Interactions

Similar to student participants, parents reported on the strategies utilized by educational assistants to facilitate appropriate socialization.

i. EA strategies. Strategies fell into two sub-categories of support including social skills training and supervision and/or encouragement. Social skills strategies were often based in behavioral issues such as:

> Parent (P): She helped him with behavior – social behavior issues. Like if [student] saw a pretty girl he would follow her down the hall and then she would go to her locker or whatever and then he would touch her arm or whatever and lean in and say hi and whatever. And if it was somebody that he didn't know, she would explain to him why it freaked her out. Like you just can't do that with strangers, you're touching and you're in their space and….so she helped him with those kinds of issues.

Supervision was less clearly articulated and often based on the EA just being in close proximity without specific knowledge as to how facilitation of peer interaction occurred.

> R: Do you have any idea how she helped facilitate that [peer interactions]?
>
> P: I know she was there with him in the class all the time watching over them, so she'd be…I'm trying to remember now. She was there watching over them.

ii. EA necessity: Socialization. Half of the parents interviewed felt that the EA was necessary for their child to socialize appropriately, while the other half felt their child was capable of making and keeping friends on their own. Unlike student participants, sub-categories of *necessity* did not arise.

iii. Extent of Engagement. Despite the attempts to facilitate inclusion made by the educational assistant, half of the parents felt that their child spent more time interacting with the EA than peers. Only one parent felt that the child spent more time with his age mates. Interestingly, five parent participants stated that their child would have preferred to spend more time interacting with their peers.

Theme two: EA Impact on Student Autonomy

Sub-themes for parents within impact on student self-determination proved to be almost identical to student participants with the exception of some underlying sub-categories which will be highlighted below.

i. Student independence. Fostering *student independence* related to circumstances in which questions or activities would either be guided by the EA or if the EA promoted independence of the student. In some cases, parents reported that peers would address questions to the EA rather than the student. This is illustrated in the following interview dialogue.

> R: And you had mentioned peers would often direct questions to [the EA]?
>
> P: They would…yeah. They would ask her…maybe for example, why he wasn't speaking or why he got upset or those kinds of things.
>
> R: In those situations would she explain to them?
>
> P: Yes.
>
> R: So she would explain to them.
>
> P: Yes.
>
> R: Would she ever direct those questions to [student] – why don't you ask [student] why he….
>
> P: No, it would be too hard for him to answer that.

This quote demonstrates student difficulty in independently engaging with peers and the resulting role that EAs may play. In other cases, parents noted that the educational assistant worked to promote independence as much as possible.

> R: Is there anything that [EA] helps [student] with that you think he could do by himself?
>
> P: I think she lets him do as much as he can. I think she makes him as independent as she can.

Alternatively, while parents generally felt that the EA tried to promote *independence*, the sub-theme of *dependency* concerns did arise.

ii. Dependency. Seven parents felt that the EA was a necessary fixture for their child and that they couldn't be included without them. Only one parent did not specify necessity. One parent felt that her son could not do anything without the EA. Another parent demonstrated uncertainty about her child's ability and the extent to which he needed assistance or had just become dependent.

> R: You kind of touched on this a little bit but is there anything that the assistant might have helped [your child] with that you think that he could have done by himself?
>
> P: I worked with him, I'm not sure. I really don't know. That was the big question. Could he be doing it by himself? The big unanswered question.

Dependency goes hand in hand with perceptions of *necessity*, and thus the latter represents the next sub-theme for **student autonomy.**

iii. EA necessity. While uncertainty about *necessity* did arise, specific sub-categories of need were uncovered from parental interviews; specifically safety, behavioral support, and inclusion. The *necessity* to provide a safe and secure environment for their children was a common response. Quite often, the need for safety related to the child's behaviors as demonstrated below.

> P: And make sure that she goes to the right places, not get lost.
> I know she can go to the washroom by herself and come back, but at the beginning she couldn't. And she has gone out of the school before and walked away from the school and I don't want that ever to happen. You just never know what she's going to do.

Necessity for behavioral support is exemplified below and goes hand in hand with safety concerns, not only for the child with a disability but also for peers and teachers.

> P: For the most part. There were days when the autism takes over and it happens when he's tired, if he's starting to get sick, if he hasn't slept well. There's all kinds of reasons why the autism might just….so then he kind of zones out. Then he almost needs to be walked through his day.
>
> R: So she needed to be within that close proximity.
>
> P: Oh yeah. And even sometimes….like with [my son] there are clear signs when there's going to be a behavior outburst.

The perception of parents that EAs must facilitate inclusion was a surprising result. The following example provides a detailed description of what many parents felt about the impact of an EA in their child's inclusion.

> R: Why was the main reason you would say that he needed to have somebody there?
>
> P: He could not have been included without her. He could not have done…the teachers wouldn't have accepted him because he couldn't do the academics, and the teachers nor classmates would have accepted him because of the behavior and without her there to run interference and to educate….he would not have been able to be there. If she hadn't educated others, like the teachers, even the administration, by the end of his time in high school and even in junior high, the teachers and staff embraced [him] in such a way….that gave him confidence to believe in himself. So it wasn't even just her belief in him that gave him confidence, because of her educating of all the others and advocacy in administration and with the teachers that turned into support for him that gave him confidence to believe in himself even more.

All parents who reported on this topic felt that an EA was necessary for their child's successful inclusion. This finding was of particular interest and will be further examined in Chapter 5.

Theme three: Educational Assistant Attributes

Corresponding with student responses, parents reported on their *likes and dislikes* of EAs, discussed the *EA role and importance*, and reported on the *emotional impact* on their child. Within each of these sub-themes, sub-categories of parent responses were distinct from student responses as noted in the following sections.

i. Likes and dislikes. Likes of EA work fell into three sub-categories, safety for their child, academic support, and social/behavioral support. Similar to reasons for *necessity*, safety emerged as an important feature of EA work that parents felt was a positive attribute.

Example 1:

> R: What do you like about having an assistant for [your daughter]?
>
> P: Well just to help her get through her day and make sure that she's getting the work done that she's supposed to be doing. Make sure that she's safe and not getting.....you know, neglected or beat up by other children.

Example 2:

> R: OK. What do you like about having an assistant for [your son]?
>
> P: I know he's safe because he's a runner and he'll take off sometimes out of the classroom.

The second sub-category of *likes* was academic support for the student. Assistance in this area was largely based on support to help focus and the need for repetition of class material. This is best exemplified in the following quote.

> P: And he's very high functioning but needs that little bit of extra time and a little bit more extra explanation that she provides. So he's able to do so much more and stay on task. He wouldn't be able to stay on task if she wasn't there.

The last positive sub-category that was uncovered was social/behavioral support. Responses in this sub-category largely related to assistance with keeping behavior in check and also with encouraging their children and boosting their self-esteem. The latter aspect of social/behavioral support is illustrated here.

> P: Just give him the confidence that he needs....that he needed.

Parents also perceived some negative aspects of EA support. Their responses spanned two sub-categories: promotion of dependency and feelings of segregation.

Responses also related to the theme of autonomy and can be seen within examples previously provided. However, they are discussed within the context of **educational assistant attributes** as they were directly reported as *dislikes*. In terms of feelings of segregation, some parents felt strongly that EA supports did not reflect inclusion, as shown in the following excerpt:

> R: What do you like about having the teaching assistant? for [your son]
>
> P: Nothing.
>
> R: Why do you say that?
>
> P: Because I think it fosters all the things that are not inclusion.

Another participant reported on concerns with separation from the classroom and their perception of this as promoting segregation.

> P: I would have said sometimes they're a little bit too controlling and kind of take the child out of the room and not get them involved.

It seems apparent there were mixed feelings surrounding the use of EA support and the potential impact they have. Yet, all parent participants reported on the importance of specific EA work with their respective children.

ii. EA role/importance. The importance of this work fell into four sub-categories including safety, facilitation of inclusion, promotion of child confidence, and helping to maintain focus. Clearly, the importance of work is very similar to the *likes* and reasons for *EA necessity* discussed previously. In addition, parents discussed what they felt the role and job description of an educational assistant entails in a more general sense. Typical duties fell into four sub-categories of responses. These sub-categories include academic support, behavioral support, advocacy, and unknown. The latter sub-category was surprisingly common in that some respondents did not know what the educational

assistant's job is. The following quotes provide three examples of this latter sub-category when participants were asked to describe the role of the EA.

> P: I don't really know her role except just to make sure that she's on task with her assignments.

> P: I don't know. All I really know is that....as a parent all I can really gauge is how much have they ____, because I feel that the school isn't telling the truth half of the time.

> P: I don't know. [My son] would know. I don't know.

The lack of knowledge about EA duties and responsibilities is potentially a cause for concern. Yet, most parents did feel they had a grasp on what the role of the EA was. The perception of the academic support role is described below:

> R: And what does [the EA] do to help [your son]?

> P: I think just help him understand and put the instructions in a different...explain it to him different so that he can understand. Put it in concise directions; make sure he's listening before you tell him. Like if he didn't have an aide it would be so destructive to the rest of the class because she'd be constantly telling [student] are you listening [student], are you paying attention. Like otherwise he would get distracted and he wouldn't hear.

The latter part of this quote also provides an example of the EA behavioral support role which was a common parental response. The final sub-category which emerged from the sub-theme of *EA role* was that of advocacy. Some respondents felt it was the duty of the EA to promote their child's inclusion in the school as previously reviewed under *EA necessity*. Given that all of the job description sub-categories discussed thus far, including academic support, behavioral support, and advocacy could be considered teacher responsibilities, the next major theme to be illustrated is the **impact of EA supports on the role of teachers.**

Theme four: EA Impact on Teacher Role

This theme relates to the extent to which or ways in which the work of an EA may impact the responsibilities of the classroom teacher. The first relevant sub-theme is the amount of student *time spent* between the teacher as compared to the EA. Secondly, who carries out instruction and *learning* strategies utilized by the EA and teacher, and finally the extent to which the EA took *ownership* for the success of the student will be discussed.

i. Time spent. Five of the 8 parents interviewed felt that their child spent a disproportionately greater amount of time interacting with the EA when compared to the teacher. Only one parent felt that more time was spent with the teacher. Of the remaining two participants, one did not know and one did not specify. EA *time spent* with the student related to acquisition of knowledge, or *learning*, and is described below.

ii. Learning. Similarly to *time engaged*, four parents felt the EA taught the student more, whereas only two parents felt that their child learned the most from the classroom teacher. One felt that teaching responsibility was equally distributed. Again, one parent did not specify. In acquiring knowledge, the *learning* strategies utilized by EAs fell into three sub-categories and included (1) modified assignments, (2) assistance with focusing, and (3) extra time. Teacher learning strategies included modified assignments, one to one attention to the student, and having high expectations. Examples of the *learning* strategies utilized by EAs as perceived by the parents are illustrated below; modified assignments, focus, and extra time respectively.

Example 1:

> R: So how….you've kind of answered this a little bit and I may be expanding on questions, but how does the assistant help him to learn – like academic type of skills?

> P: He has the repetition, using lots of visuals, making sure that there's visual – the pictures to go along with, the special reading program she works with. She sends work home that I can work with him on. Hand over hand….so with printing and that kind of stuff, she would work with him. For instance when they do spelling tests, there's no way he would be able to keep up with his spelling tests if he had to write the words himself. So she has made up little tiles with the letters and he pulls the tiles out, puts them in and then she writes the word down.

Example 2:

> R: So how would you say the assistant helped facilitate his acquisition of new skills, learning?
>
> P: Keeping him in focus. Because [the EA] obviously couldn't be there beside each of them at all times. And sometimes of course the day or whatever, he wouldn't be able to keep up. So they fall behind and he gets the extra time to do that and she works with him one on one just to finish up the spelling.

The extent to which EAs are teaching students with special needs is a critical question, though not specifically addressed in this study. However, the extent to which EAs feel responsible for the success of the student may provide some insight as described below.

iii. EA ownership. The final and possibly most significant sub-theme relating to **teacher role** was the extent to which parents felt EAs took *ownership* for student success. Closely related to job description, responsibility for student success was perceived by parents across four sub-categories including advocacy, behavioral support, discipline and academic *ownership*. One parent described a situation whereby the EA took responsibility in advocating for the student to get the teacher to accept him.

> P: She didn't back down from a teacher – like that last year he was in Corral and the teacher was not really too accepting of people with disabilities but because [my son] could do grade appropriate curriculum and was actually working for a credit, he couldn't deny him.

In order to decrease the impact of behaviors on the other students and classroom teacher as well as to avoid the student posing a classroom imposition, EAs often cited behavioral *ownership* of the student. An example follows.

> P: … If there was tension in the school because of exams, he was tense and he was ten times more tense than anybody else. And she [the EA] needed to be there too because you never know when that's going to happen. You never know what's going to throw him….you never know what's going to happen in his classroom – if the teacher is going to….and the teacher and classmates shouldn't have to deal with [his] behavior. You know what I mean?

It is evident in this quote that the expectation is for the EA to take control in behavioral situations to avoid classroom disruption. In addition to managing behavior, some parents reported that the EA had taken *ownership* of disciplining their child rather than the teacher taking that role.

> P: I had to go to the Vice Principal about that. She was doing some things that I didn't like.
>
> R: Can you expand on those things?
>
> P: Well, she was giving her detentions that I didn't think was necessary.
>
> R: The assistant was giving detentions?
>
> P: Yes. Yes. And that made me rather upset.

The final sub-category within the sub-theme of *EA ownership* to emerge from parent interviews was the responsibility taken by or given to EAs for academics when the perception existed that it should be the responsibility of the teacher. One parent exemplified this when she stated "if you had a proficient teacher in my opinion you don't have to have a teacher's assistant".

Theme five: EA Impact on School Inclusion

An important intent of general education for students with disabilities is the facilitation of group inclusion. The resulting theme of **school inclusion** is an important finding given this intent. Within this theme, four sub-themes were evident. The first of which is *challenges* to inclusion. The second relates to *solo special activities* between

student and EA. Thirdly, *proximity* of the EA to the student including seating arrangement emerged, and finally mechanisms by which the EA *facilitates inclusion.* Sub-categories of responses among the sub-themes for **school inclusion** will be discussed from parent perspectives.

i. Challenges. Parents felt that certain *challenges* impact the extent to which inclusion will be successful for their child. From the interview data, two main sub-categories of *challenges* emerged; system/funding challenges and interfering behaviors. At the district level, funding for students with disabilities was found to be a challenge. A specific aspect of this challenge is represented here.

> P: It's such an issue is funding. And they only get so much funding per capita too, so and this is a higher needs area. There are more special-ed funding required in this school division than there is in others. I'd love it if we didn't have to worry about it. Wouldn't it be nice if we just had…that would be great.

Student behavior to affect inclusion within the school was also found. One parent of a child with autism described the types of situations within the general education setting that were antecedents for behavior. An example follows.

> P: Yeah, or somebody with dyed hair….like streaked that might bug him and he might think that that needs to be washed out. It could be anything like that – it could be something on the teacher's desk that was never there before, or the way the teacher had his book laying – upside down or with a bookmark sticking out of it and he hates bookmarks. It could be all those kinds of things and as there were more than one, he could get agitated and not be able to explain why.

Thus the school environment might pose a challenge for student success. The way in which the EA works with a student can also impact group inclusion.

ii. Solo activities. Special one to one activities between student and EA were reported by some parents. These activities were often related to difficult course material or student breaks. The following provides an example.

> P: They go to a separate bathroom for bathroom breaks together. They used to go to the library and work on the computer together when the other kids were doing an activity that was too complex for him or he had needed some time out – time kind of thing.

iii. Proximity. In addition to separation, EA *proximity* to the student was often cited. Seven parents reported that they thought the EA was beside or in close proximity to their child a majority of the time during the school day. Three parents reported that the EA sat directly beside their child in class. The rationale for including *proximity* in the **school inclusion** theme is based on the review of literature which argues that if space is being taken up by an EA, space cannot be taken up by peers. The extent to which this is happening can impact the *facilitation of inclusion*; the final sub-theme.

iv. Facilitation of Inclusion. The final and most pertinent sub-theme was *facilitation of inclusion*. This sub-theme was comprised of three sub-categories of strategies that parents perceived to be used by EAs to *facilitate inclusion* for students. These sub-categories include teacher support, educating students/teachers, and behavioral support. Teacher support is discussed in the following quote.

> R: And how do you think that their assistants help their inclusion in school?
>
> P: My understanding really is that the teacher assistant is helping the teacher cope with the whole class. Like that's my intention. In fact if it weren't for them I wouldn't necessarily have ____ but what I am saying is I expect a suitable program for them and what I think the teachers and the school is saying is that they can't do it all. The teacher assistant needs to be there to help them.

Sensitization of other students and teachers concerning students with a disability was reported to be an important support for the *facilitation of inclusion*. This education was largely based on facilitating understanding and consequently acceptance as demonstrated below.

R: How do you think [student's] assistant has facilitated inclusion in this classroom and the school he's in?

P: Oh immensely. She's made it very comfortable for both him and the other kids and provides a lot of information to the other kids about the differences and to [my son] about appropriate behavior. And just a safe environment.

A final strategy in this sub-theme was providing behavioral support. It was often noted by parents that their child's behaviors interfere with socialization and thus inclusion and is best illustrated in the next quote.

P: Oh yes because the more he learns about appropriate behavior, the safer it's going to be and then the more the kids will include him and play with him.

The next and final section of results summarizes the findings from interview analysis of the EA group.

Analysis of Educational Assistant Interview data

Interview analysis for EAs resulted in five themes as reported for both students and parents. Distinctions among sub-themes and sub-categories were noted and will be delineated within this section.

Theme one: EA Impact on Peer Interactions

Three sub-themes were derived under the **EA impact on peer interactions** theme.

i. EA strategies. When discussing their roles, three specific sub-categories were indicated to facilitate peer interaction with the inclusion of (1) peer groups/setting up opportunities, (2) role play, and (3) social skills training. Descriptors for each sub-category respectively are highlighted below.

Example 1:

R: Did you help him work to learn to make friends or socialize?

Educational Assistant (EA): Yes.

R: What kinds of strategies did you use to facilitate that?

EA: [He] is very outgoing but we find a good role model for him and put him as the desk partner. At recess we have a buddy system where every day there would be a different friend to play with. So all the kids… [student] last year was included one hundred percent. So all the kids picked friends, so they played with different friends, stuff like that.

Example 2:

R: Do you help [student] learn to make friends or socialize appropriately?

EA: We talk quite often about appropriate choices that he's making. Different scenarios when something does happen. I'll talk about different scenarios with him and how maybe it would have worked better or what would have been a better choice for an action for him or reaction.

Example 3:

R: Did you help [student] make friends or socialize?

EA: Yes. I did a lot of appropriate social behavior type training. And also again with the students, having them understand who he was and what he actually was capable of.

R: So did you use any specific strategies to facilitate?

EA: I started off with social stories and stuff like that. But that wasn't always effective. So then what I did was I got the kids to write because [student] wrote. He didn't speak. So I would get them to talk and write down questions and then he would respond to them that way in class. Also encouraged him as far as going up and saying hello and appropriately saying hello, things like that.

ii. Extent of engagement. Socialization relates directly to spending time interacting with peers. The sub-theme of *extent of engagement is* defined as the time spent interacting between EA and peers and was noted for EAs as well. Four of the EAs reported that the student spent more time interacting with them over peers, three felt that the student spent more time interacting with peers, and one felt equal time was spent between self and peers. Interestingly, five EA respondents reported that the student

preferred spending their time with them over age mates. Reasons cited for this preference related to student feelings of security, assistance, attachment and friendship. Security involved feelings of safety and assurance with the EA being present as exemplified below.

> R: And that kind of tied into my next questions was who do you think he preferred to spend his time with during the day? You or the other kids?
>
> EA: Preferred? Me
>
> R: Yes, and why do you think that is.
>
> EA: Because I was his security. He knew me and he knew if there was anything he needed as far as toileting, little things like that. When he was scared he'd pretend he was scared monsters were coming in, he would come to me, it was just like a security blanket.

In terms of assistance, student preference for the educational assistant's companionship was reported to be based on keeping up with class materials. Such as:

> R: You mentioned that when he's kind of stressed out with school work, that's when he prefers to spend time with you and that would be the reason why?
>
> EA: He knows I'm the helper and if he knows he's behind in taking notes, if he can't keep up, the pencil comes to me very fast. He gets very anxious, very quick.

The third sub-category uncovered as a reason for preferred EA companionship was student attachment to the EA.

> R: Who did [student] prefer to spend him time with, would it be you or the other kids, like if he had his preference?
>
> EA: He's quite attached to me which I'm not sure was the healthiest for him but again that _____ and I'm not going to lie to you I really liked the little boy.

The final response sub-category was friendship between the student and the EA. Some EAs felt that they understood the student better than their peers and as a result the student preferred to spend time with them. This finding is demonstrated below.

R: Who do you think [student] preferred to spend time with, was it you or the other kids?

EA: Probably me.

R: Why do you think that was?

EA: [She] started going to ___ since last year but before that I think she's only been around adults with her parents and all. She would talk about things that really you would talk to an adult more than kids. She'd talk about her computer games, it wasn't the same computer games the other kids played. And talked about Little House on the prairie, which of course the other kids didn't even know what that was. That kind of thing. I think she's talked to me probably more.

The perception of friendship was an interesting finding and the implications of such will be provided in following chapter.

iii. EA necessity: Socialization. In terms of socialization with peers specifically, five EAs felt that they were necessary supports for appropriate student socialization. Only one felt the student did not require their support to interact with peers. Two participants did not specify. The main reasons reported for the perception of *EA necessity* were for behavioral assistance and helping the student to understand their peers. At times, EAs were present during school breaks and reported that during those times they provided safety and guidance to the student during interactions with peers. Examples of the two such incidents follow respectively.

Example 1:

R: So during recess times, were you there with him or was there an assistant there with him?

EA: There was always someone supervising. Not just [student] but other children.

R: Did he need extra support?

EA: Extra support and extra supervision. Not only support because although [he] is very, very, very high functioning, he has been known to run away or attention

> seeking behaviors which would be something like throwing sand, or pushing and hitting. So we were there as a safety.

Example 2:

> EA: Initially I was and then we basically phased me out so that he was on his own, made it seven minutes between classes. So he was responsible to go to his locker to switch his books and then get to class after that.
>
> R: What did he need you for during the breaks before you were phased out?
>
> EA: Basically guidance, direction, that kind of thing.

The perception of *necessity* for socialization, although well intended may have an inadvertent **impact on student autonomy**; the second dominant theme to emerge.

Theme two: EA Impact on Student Autonomy

Three sub-themes comprised **impact on student autonomy** for EA participants; *student independence* in activities, issues with *dependency*, and *EA necessity*. These sub-themes are presented below.

i. Student independence. The sub-theme of *student independence* relates to EA guidance in activities or questions. Assistance given to the student was related to three sub-categories of circumstance including student shyness, behaviors, or unknown answers. The following excerpt is an example of a circumstance for EA guidance in an activity.

> R: Whether a peer asked him a question or the teacher asked him a question. Are there circumstances in which you have to provide the answer?
>
> EA: I try not to. If I need to assist I find it in the book for him. If it's a teacher question. If he looks to me I may question him to get the answer out of him if it's from a peer. Generally if it's from the teacher I look through his notes, I help him find the answer and then I show him, ok, this is what your teacher is looking for, this is what you need to answer.
>
> R: And he would answer that?

> EA: Yes. I rarely would answer…no, I don't answer for him. I try to get the answer for him if he needs help because he will look to me right away. Like if the teacher asks him a question, say…and right now he's looking at me and I'll say well she's asked you this, where do we find it? It's in your notes, it's here, it's on the page, or whatever.
>
> R: How often does he need that support when the teacher asks him a question?
>
> EA: Probably about half the time.

Student independence in answering leads into the opposing sub-theme of issues with *dependency*.

ii. Dependency. As perceived by the EAs, student *dependency* on the EA was evident, but was not always articulated as such; in some cases dependency was inferred by the researcher. The following illustrates perceived dependency of the student on the EA.

> R: Where do you normally sit in relation to [student] in the class?
>
> EA: Actually right now the teacher has us in fours. So I'm with his group of four.
>
> R: So you sit right in the quadron?
>
> EA: Yes. I'm in the desk beside him. It doesn't seem to bother him. He does tell me I'm his helper so that's what I'm there for. If I move off and maybe chose not to help with everything, he says you're my helper.
>
> R: Are there any issues regarding independence with [student]?
>
> EA: Yes. I think there will be more so because he does not like…I shouldn't say he doesn't like to, he cannot work on his own. He depends on you to either keep him going, help him, prod him, just…everything has to be broken down in such small little increments and he has to be just walked through it all the time. So giving him a day's thing and saying this and this needs to be done. It's not going to happen. He's going to need assistance.

In addition to *independence* and *dependency*, perceived *EA necessity* as a sub-theme has implications for **student autonomy**.

iii. EA necessity. Self-determination is largely based upon the perception that you are able to independently engage and be successful in tasks and situations. Of the eight EAs interviewed, seven felt that the student needed them. *Necessity* was rooted in four common sub-categories labeled (1) behavior, (2) safety, (3) encouragement and (4) teacher relief. An example of each is given respectively below.

Example 1:

R: Did [student] need you as an assistant?

EA: Definitely.

R: Can you explain to me for what and why you think he needed you in the class?

EA: [He] is a child with a very high functioning child with Downs Syndrome. Without somebody encouraging him, [he] would...cannot follow a teacher in front of a classroom. He can't. Not only can't he follow the instructions and do it independently without someone encouraging and supporting him right there, it's the behavior. I mean like I said he is not an aggressive little boy, but he can run and hide, he can take off. Attention seeking with grabbing and stuff. There's no way a teacher with 20 kids in the class and with [him], and [he] also wears pull-ups so there's toileting. He also has eating issues, bringing up a bit. So there's lots of little issues. And people look at [student] and say oh he can do fine in the classroom, well if the teacher didn't have the support, he would be sitting there because he would not open up page 3 and do his work. He needs that support.

Example 2:

R: Did [student] need you as an assistant?

EA: Need? I think yes.

R: If you could just say like the main reason why or for what specific things.

EA: Initially…let me think about that for a minute. I don't think [he] could have went through school without some sort of support. I mean he's definitely functioning at a lower level and needs somebody to be there as a support system to help him to do what he needs to do. As far as being out in the work world now and things like that, I think [he] is very independent. He doesn't need anybody beside him anymore for that. At school he needed somebody there to make him feel safe.

Example 3:

R: Did [student] need you as an assistant?

EA: I think so.

R: Can you explain why.

EA: He needed me because he had a hard time attending in class. He was younger than everybody else. He wanted to play and when we went to gym, we went to music, his whole attitude changed because it was fun and it was playing. So he needed someone to make the rest of the day exciting for him too.

Example 4:

R: Does [student] need you as an assistant?

EA: I don't know. Like because he's very good behaved and if a teacher is very well able to modify…but I think yes he would think he does. He gets lost very fast.

R: Can you kind of expand on the reasons why you think he needs you.

EA: Then it becomes part of the teacher's job then. And I don't think that she's going to be able to…like it might be ok for a day. And they can say ok [student] this is yours and you do this and you copy these. But what happens then when she's going on with the rest of the class and he hasn't caught up. He's going to feel more lost. And he does well enough to know when he is behind. When he has not got what the rest of the kids have.

Perceptions of *necessity* undoubtedly influence the extent to which a student is viewed as autonomous by EAs, which may have implications for the degree to which student independence is promoted.

Theme three: Educational Assistant Attributes

EA interviews revealed numerous sub-categories of response under the theme **educational assistant attributes**. Specific components of the EA role are emphasized.

i. Likes and dislikes. Both *likes and dislikes* of job duties and characteristics were analyzed and grouped into sub-categories. Only one sub-category of response was noted

for job *likes* and all participants concurred. The job was reported to be "rewarding" in that seeing "growth" and "making a difference" were the positive characteristics of the job. Dislikes were grouped more into systemic problems, and included lack of education, lack of preparation time, excess paperwork, and boundary confusion. No negative job aspects were noted for direct interaction with the students. The former sub-categories are self-illustrative and boundary confusion is depicted below.

> R: What didn't you like about working as a teaching assistant?
>
> EA: Not knowing the boundaries. Sometimes you wondered if what you were doing was actually stepping way over the guidelines as far as what a TA is supposed to do. Talked quite at length about that with the board and the administration.

ii. EA role. Job definitions emerged into four different sub-categories and provide a context for the positive and negative **attributes** of EA work previously discussed. EAs described their role as being: (1) a one-to-one assistant, (2) a facilitator of inclusion, (3) an assistant to the teacher, or (4) a modifier of school material. Within these role descriptions, the duty of building student confidence also emerged. These sub-categories are illustrated respectively in the subsequent excerpts.

Example 1:

> R: Describe your job as a TA.
>
> EA: Usually I'm working one on one with a child. This year I am working one on one with a child. In previous years I've been in a classroom where I'm hired for one student but I help more than one student.

Example 2:

> R: So the first question is how you would define or describe your job when you were working as a teaching assistant?
>
> EA: As a teaching assistant I wore a lot of different hats. I was advocating for the student, for the school, advocating for the student for the mom, or for the school

> at the mom, the mom with the school. So it's an advocator. Advocating for him with the teachers I guess. And also the teachers with him because he wouldn't always understand and would get frustrated at what they were wanting. That kind of thing.

Example 3:

> EA: My role is to basically follow teacher instruction. The teacher will…there are times when I will modify curriculum myself also but generally when we have a general class, [the teacher] will modify the curriculum to many different levels so that she can generically teach the whole class but they are all have different expectations. I would then at that point reinforce concepts, clarification. Go around doing reinforcing clarification. When I work in 101 then I will modify stuff as I see needed and also again reinforce the concepts and clarification and support. And mentoring and social worker…so much.

Example 4:

> R: So how would you describe your job?
>
> EA: A lot of modification ____ working with [student] it was pretty much attempt something and then just change it if we needed to.

Within these four job *role* sub-categories, the facilitation of confidence building was noted as an important duty and is demonstrated in the following quote.

> EA: [Student] specifically…sitting beside him, one on one, reinforcing concepts, clarifying concepts. Sometimes just mentoring. Talking to him about whatever issue might arise. And also building self-esteem strategies. Pump him up. Lots of pumping up [student].

Building student confidence can have a positive impact on the emotional well-being of students with disabilities. Accordingly, the *emotional impact* of having EA supports emerged as a sub-theme.

iii. Emotional impact. The last sub-theme to emerge from the **educational assistant attributes** theme was the *emotional impact* of EA work on students. Three sub-categories of impact were cited; (1) safety/security, (2) student enjoyment, and (3)

student frustration. Impact of EA support on students' emotions is depicted respectively in the subsequent quotes.

Example 1:

> R: Just in your perception, how do you think he felt?
>
> EA: Safe, safe is the word. He felt safe. He wanted to go to school everyday. His mom would pick him up but he did the same thing to me, no I'm not going home and ran back in the classroom.

Example 2:

> EA: Yes. We had a lot of fun together. He has a really good sense of humor. We joked, we laughed. Some of my jokes he didn't get so I'd have to explain them. I think he was grateful that I was there.

Example 3:

> R: How do you think [student] feels about having an assistant?
>
> EA: He has never said anything derogatory to me about being his assistant. He sometimes hires and fires at will. If he thinks I'm being too hard on him, you're fired. Last year or two years ago he fired the other aide.
>
> EA: Sometimes he was really angry at me because he would want to for example go and hug somebody that he didn't even know and I would catch him before he did that…So that was kind of frustrating for him too – get out of my life. I have a mother at home; I don't need somebody here too.

Emotional impact is obviously individually based and it is important to note that both positive and negative aspects were evident in the responses of the participants.

Theme four: EA Impact on Teacher Role

The fourth overarching theme consistent with all participant groups is the impact of the EA role on teacher role. Within this theme, *time spent* with EA compared to the classroom teacher was queried and five participants stated that the student spent more time interacting with them than the teacher.

i. Learning. EA interaction with the student involved facilitating student learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Four EAs reported that the student learned more from them than from the teacher. Only two stated that the student learned more from the teacher. One felt there was equal influence from teacher and EA, and one answer was unspecified. In the facilitation of *learning*, four strategies utilized by EAs were uncovered. EA teaching strategies included one-to-one assistance, curriculum modification, reinforcement of student and concepts, and the use of fun and humor while educating. The following quote provides an example of both curriculum modification and reinforcement of concepts.

> R: And you mentioned this a little bit already and was kind of explaining concepts and stuff, but how would you say that you helped [student] to learn and acquire skills?
>
> EA: Definitely reinforcing and clarifying concepts. That's the biggest thing we do. Giving them support. A lot of modifying curriculum to help them better understand. Prepare other curriculum to help support what they were doing.

In addition to teaching responsibilities, student and parental *relationships* with the educational assistants were uncovered as a sub-theme.

ii. EA relationships. Relationships with parents were predominantly described as collaborative. Additionally, student/EA *relationships* were all described as positive. The only sub-category to emerge from student *relationships* was that of friendship. Some EA participants saw their student as a friend. This is exemplified below.

Example 1:

> EA: I like to think that we were friends. I would like to think that …because if they saw me outside of school, they would come up and they would give me a

hug, like that kind of thing. So I think…I would like to think that I was a mentor, that I showed them some things that they could use for the rest of their life.

Example 2:

R: How would you describe your relationship with [student]?

EA: Just an older friend I guess.

The final sub-theme incorporated into **EA impact on teacher role** was *EA ownership* of the student's success.

iii. EA ownership. Ownership for EAs was articulated as follows: (1) to relieve the teacher, (2) to provide academic assistance to the student, and (3) feelings of obligation associated with the EA role. The following excerpts illustrate these respectively.

Example 1:

EA: Because when we're assigned a child, that's who…she knows I was her aide. She knows if she needed help it was me because the teacher has all the kids. So a lot of the kids aren't assigned aides. So the kids who are assigned aides, they kind of come to us first and then the teacher. Like I say the teacher's got all the kids in the classroom to worry about.

Example 2:

R: Can you kind of expand on the reasons why you think he needs you.

EA: Then it becomes part of the teacher's job then. And I don't think that she's going to be able to…like it might be ok for a day. And they can say ok [student] this is yours and you do this and you copy these. But what happens then when she's going on with the rest of the class and he hasn't caught up. He's going to feel more lost. And he does well enough to know when he is behind. When he has not got what the rest of the kids have.

Example 3:

EA: It is defined but it's kind of different for everybody's job. When you're a one on one TA in a high school, you're basically advocating for that student wherever you are. And you're basically like I say educating the educators. And sometimes

> felt like I was pushing more for them to understand than they would have given the time to. But I thought it was important that they did understand. It was more going beyond and above and being scared that I had gone too far.

The fifth and final dominant theme to be reviewed is inclusion within the school.

Theme five: EA Impact on School Inclusion

Inclusion within the school as a whole is influenced by many factors. Factors that ...ose from EA interviews include percentage of time in close *proximity* to the student which includes portion of time spent with the student in the day, occurrence of *solo activities*, encouragement and *facilitation of inclusion*, and challenges affecting inclusion.

i. Proximity. Time spent together between the student and EA was described in a variety of ways. Initially, participants described the percentage of their day spent with the student. Results of time spent are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. EA Participants Reporting Portion of Their Day Spent with Student

Portion of Day with student	Number of Participants
Less than 25 %	2
26-50%	2
51-75%	0
76-100%	4

During parts of the day when EAs were with their assigned student, three reported that they remained in close *proximity* to the student 76-100% of the time. The remaining four participants reported spending between 0-50% of the time in close *proximity* to their assigned student.

ii. Solo activities. During the day, some participants reported that they engaged in *solo activities* with the student apart from other students in the class. The three sub-categories of activities included (1) academics, (2) functional life skills, and (3) behavioral breaks. The frequency of these activities was unspecified. Examples of these follow respectively.

Example 1:

> R: Did you and [student] have to do work or activities that were just the two of you that the other kids weren't involved in?
>
> EA: Yes we have.
>
> R: What kind of activities?
>
> EA: Social studies. Information overload is a problem for him. So we just for a couple of days we did a little project in social studies where we just did a time line sort of thing and just isolated exactly the concepts we wanted [student] to understand and learn. And we just wrote them up on a time line and then he presented it to the other students.

Example 2:

> R: Did you and [student] ever do activities just the two of you that the other kids didn't do?
>
> EA: A lot of times…we do a lot of unusual…use a lot of unusual strategies in this program because it's not hugely based on academics, it's based more on life skills, work skills, social skills, that kind of thing. So there might be times when I would work alone with [student] in here or somewhere else…I would take him to his job and talk to his employer with him. We would look for jobs together.

Example 3:

> R: What would be the main reason for removal?
>
> EA: [Student] gets very upset and he gets very angry at times. And he doesn't benefit from being in the classroom then. Or I don't see him as benefiting. So I will pull him out now and then and just ask the teacher if it's ok to take him out and we'll go and just talk about what's bothering him, what's going on.

Alternatively to separate activities, EAs reported on encouragement provided for group inclusion and how they facilitated student inclusion in the school.

iii. Facilitation of inclusion. Within this sub-theme, three sub-categories were noted and include (1) encouragement, (2) facilitation strategies, and (3) challenges. Strategies used by EAs to encourage inclusion consisted of setting up opportunities with peers and providing suggestions for group activities. In addition to encouragement, strategies utilized to *facilitate inclusion* consisted of advocacy, educating peers and use of equivalent school materials. In efforts to facilitate this inclusion, challenges were noted and related to student behaviors and the occurrence of bullying. Examples of encouragement, facilitation strategies, and challenges are found respectively below.

Example 1:

> R: Did you encourage [student] to play with other kids or to join…you were talking about that a little bit. How did you usually encourage her? Like what would you do?
>
> EA: Sometimes if she'd say I don't know how to do that, we would do it with her beforehand and show her. Or we would get one of the kids say can you sit here and pretend to partner just to show her. Because a lot of games, kids are very good at picking up games. I don't know if it's how their brains are wired or what, but they're better at picking up strange games than they are at picking up math. So just try to get somebody else to be her partner and encourage her or like me be her partner to teach her how to do it. But she liked games and she liked learning new games.

Example 2:

> R: How do you think you helped facilitate [student] inclusion within the school?
>
> EA: Again it goes back to advocating for him. Did a lot of that. Helping [student] express himself, like encouraging him to express himself to the teachers, as far as what he was capable of. There were times that I would say would you like to say something to teacher X, because say he was agitated and he would write I'm really upset about my school mark or whatever. Then I'd call the teacher over and the teacher would say what are you upset about, he would write it down and

> the two of them would write back and forth so that the teachers were on top of that.

Example 3:

> R: Was there any bullying concerns with him?
>
> EA: No and yes. Most of it was how he seen it. He would come and say that so and so is calling me...yes, in some respects it was but in some respects it was just what his take on it too. And we do try and talk to the child that's saying these things because they're really not appropriate and then try and teach [student] to say ok…some of these things we have to brush off because it happens to children. But if you're really feeling hurt or if it begins to be something on your character or they're trying to hurt you…then we have to deal with it.

The content of this section has described and highlighted the results from the thematic analysis executed on all the interviews with all participant groups. Within the five common themes across participant groups, sub-themes and sub-categories were demarcated for each. A substantial amount of information was found within the interviews and the following chapter will provide interpretations for significant findings in an attempt to understand the experiences of the participants. In addition, implications of the results and suggestions for practice and future research will be emphasized in Chapter 5.

Chapter V

Discussion

In the preceding chapter, students, parents, and educational assistants shared their perceptions towards paraprofessional supports in inclusive education setting. The shared experiences and perceptions were indicated across themes of EA impact on peer interaction, EA impact on student autonomy, educational assistant attributes, EA impact on teacher role, and EA impact on school inclusion. EA role and resulting impact to the student were viewed similarly across participant groups. Given the profusion of data, this chapter will focus on the dominant thematic results in the context of existing literature. Educational attributes as a theme will be discussed within the context of the remaining themes as its content is relevant and intertwined throughout. This chapter will conclude with implications for inclusion policy and practice.

Peer Interactions

In many cases, the employment of EAs for students with disabilities is seen as desirable for the facilitation of peer networks and appropriate socialization. The results of this study indicate that students, parents, and EAs felt that the EA was a facilitator of social interaction. The facilitation of social skills along with assistance for peer interactions is seen as a positive and promising role for EAs to serve in the inclusion of students with disabilities (Giangreco et al., 2005). In addition, attitudes held by peers towards individual EAs have been found to impact the extent to which peers interact with a student with a disability. Optimistically, study respondents felt that the EA participants were viewed favorably by peers; potentially promoting positive relationships between the included students and their age mates. The exception to this was one student who

indicated that having an EA who was disliked by peers negatively affected his friendships. This latter case is an example of the student/EA "package deal" which was uncovered by Giangreco et al. (1997) in that the student and EA are seen as one. Despite being an exception to the positive views found in the current study, it remains an indication of the extent that EA likeability influences socialization of an included student. Ultimately, the social status of a student should not be contingent upon the likeability of one adult.

Alternatively, the promotion of socialization and peer networking have the potential to be hindered given that participants in each grouping reported that the student spent a majority of the school day interacting with the EA as opposed to other students. This finding is disconcerting given that Giangreco et al. (1997) found that when EAs were not in close proximity or interacting with their respective students, peers were more likely to fill up vacant space, thus increasing the potential for peer socialization. In addition, the facilitation of positive student/teacher relationships via the EA has been demonstrated as a positive aspect of EA supports as a mechanism to increase student social standing (Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003). However, current study results indicate that teacher interactions with students were limited when compared to interactions with EAs, and thus social standing of the student is unlikely to be promoted as a function of the teacher/student relationship. This finding concurs with the study by Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman (2001) in which teacher initiated interaction was infrequent with students with disabilities given one-to-one EA proximity to the student. Ironically, the facilitation of peer interaction may be promoted and deterred by EAs at the very same time.

School Inclusion

Group or school inclusion goes hand in hand with peer socialization. The extent to which a child feels they are a part of the group can have significant implications for their well-being and school success. Ideas discussed in the preceding paragraph can be carried over into school inclusion with the addition of student separation from classroom activities. In the current study, participants from each group reported student engagement in separate activities with the EA apart from peers for the purposes of academics, life skills training and dealing with behaviors. Despite an apparent or inferred need for such separation, the resulting effect may be further social isolation of the student (Giangreco et al., 1997). Of the student participants, 3 out of 8 felt that the assistant was present for them individually to provide one to one support. This has implications for the extent to which a student feels different from their peers, and is thus included in the group.

School inclusion can be demonstrated through participation in school groups and activities. Unfortunately, only two participants were involved in groups, one of which was accompanied by an EA, further signifying the student and EA as a unit. Despite the apparent drawbacks to group inclusion, parents and EAs reported on facilitation of inclusion through EA supports. This facilitation was executed through advocacy and utilization of strategies to promote successful inclusion (e.g. setting up opportunities). The existing literature has not examined the extent to which and the mechanisms by which EAs encourage school inclusion as a whole. Thus, this was an important finding in which both parents and EAs reported on ways that educational assistants promote group inclusion among teachers and students with success. Nonetheless, the EA's role in

facilitating inclusion can have inadvertent, damaging influences on the autonomy of students with disabilities.

Student Autonomy

The importance of student self-determination and autonomy cannot be understated and within this study, various sub-themes reflected the potential impact of EA supports. The most significant aspect of student autonomy was the perception that the EA was necessary; a perception held by the students, parents and EAs alike. The extent to which students with disabilities feel competent and self-sufficient can have tremendous implications for their education, both present and future. As noted in Chapter 4, seven participants within each group reported EA necessity. Although this was not a new or surprising finding for parent and EA participants (French & Chopra, 1999), it was very interesting to uncover that the students themselves view such supports as crucial.

Necessary support was predominately based in social skills and inclusion, but was also viewed as such for academics. Perceptions of necessity have the potential to decrease self-determination and increase toleration of both necessary and unnecessary assistance. Seven out of eight of the students reported that their respective assistants were in close proximity to them a substantial portion of the time; half of whom preferred having their EA close by. Although this finding signifies a positive relationship between student and EA, it also signifies dependence. Similarly, a majority of EA participants felt the student preferred spending time with them rather than peers for friendship and security reasons. Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) found that when students viewed their EAs as friends it was likely associated with a lack of sufficient social network of age-appropriate classmates. In the current study, it was the EAs who viewed themselves as friends which

creates an even larger cause for concern. When a student is viewed as a friend by an EA, although likely with good intention, it is probable that the fostering of social relationships will not be as extensive as they should be and the likelihood of boundary crossing is increased. EAs defined as friends are a potential indicator that a student does not maintain an age appropriate peer network and poses new questions of EA supports pertaining to boundary issues (Broer, Doyle & Giangreco).

Alternative to friendship for EA preference is the notion of safety. Ultimately, protection is a common rationale of parents for assignment of an EA and its perceived necessity (Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco, 2005). Necessity for safety and protection has implications for the extent to which students with disabilities are exposed to learning opportunities; albeit potentially threatening. Although it is common sense that we wish to protect students from teasing or bullying, being sheltered by EAs from these occurrences not only disallows learning to take place, but leads to an underestimation of the extent to which bullying occurs in inclusive settings for students with disabilities (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco). Not knowing the extent of such circumstances disallows policy and procedural changes to support students with disabilities who do not have access to EA supports and thus are not being sheltered. EA feelings of friendship and protection are only two mechanisms by which EA ownership of the student may be increased and the responsibility of teachers for students with disabilities may be impaired; additional factors also exist and are discussed below.

Role of Teachers

Interference with teacher responsibility is relatively well established in the literature (Giangreco et al., 2005). In the current study, responsibility of teachers was

influenced as a function of EA time spent with the student and EA ownership of the student. EA ownership was largely based upon advocacy, teacher relief, behavioral support, and academic support. Relief of the teacher was related to feelings of ensuring that the student did not pose problems for other students or the teacher. This result is similar to the findings of Marks et al. (1999) and Giangreco et al. (2001) that EAs felt they were responsible for the success of the included student. As such, it is not surprising at the number of parents and EAs who viewed EA supports as necessary. Ownership was largely based upon academic assistance, similar to Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999), whereby the majority of EAs, parents and students felt the most was learned from the assistant as opposed to the teacher. In fact, student, parent and EA participants defined the role of the EA as including the provision of academic assistance. This finding of academic ownership and the overwhelming majority of participants that felt the EA taught the student more is cause for tremendous concern given that the education of EAs is not as thorough or specialized as that of teachers, and thus students may not be receiving adequate or appropriate instruction.

In summary, the results of this study indicated that students, parents and educational assistants hold similar perceptions as to the role of EA supports. The potential impact to students with disabilities has been inferred from the results and their relation to existing research. Educational assistant supports influence peer relationships, student autonomy, school inclusion, and the responsibilities of teachers. The influences can be both positive and negative. The positive aspects of support are generally articulated as reasons for EA assignment but assignment is not deterred by the negative implications.

Future Considerations: Research and Practice

To date, there is a lack of empirical support for the use of EAs. The research that does exist has not changed over the past three decades and basically consists of the potential detrimental effects of educational aide services on students with special needs and author requests for more quantitative evidence. Several considerations should be weighed in the creation of a plan to increase the effective use of EAs working with students with special needs. Initially, it is important to enlist the assistance of peers not only to promote social interaction, but also because peer mediated interventions have been empirically supported in the literature as positive influences. They have been shown to have a controlling effect on the on-task behavior and social interactions of students with behavior disorders (Locke, Fuchs, & Lynn, 1995; Shukla, Kennedy, & Cushing, 1999), as well as to produce superior weekly academic effects and a greater variety of academic responding for students with disabilities when compared to teacher developed instructional procedures (Greenwood et al., 1984).

Given the potential for success of peer mediated instruction and tutoring it is imperative that schools investigate and adapt the instruction and organizational arrangement of special needs learning to incorporate such strategies. Additionally, given the potential adverse effects of one-on-one EA support, it is imperative to use supports as needed rather than haphazard assignment, in order to deter dependency and segregation and foster social acceptance. This could potentially be achieved through the use of a rotational system of EA delivery in which program based EAs provide assistance to a variety of students with special needs on a rotating basis to avoid the autonomy of the EA-student dyad, deter dependency, and promote student autonomy.

Study Limitations and Strengths

The results of this study are ultimately limited to time and place and based upon a small sample in Alberta. The extent to which results are applicable to other students with disabilities, their parents, and their EAs is largely based upon the readers understanding of similarity to and applicability to their own circumstances. This study adds to the research on EA supports by providing the perspectives of students with disabilities which have been absent from the literature. It extends the recent study by Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) as it was based in the present rather than retrospective study. In addition, it allows the voices of students with low-incidence disabilities to be heard; voices which have to date been silent in the research on EA supports. Finally, this study provides a Canadian context to research on EA supports.

Conclusion

The large population of educational assistants employed in the Canadian educational system to support students with disabilities coupled with the concerns of ineffectiveness and inadvertent detriments make it imperative to put in place supports to remedy the current system of EA use. It is not my intent to argue that EAs should not be utilized as supports in educational setting for students with disabilities; rather, I argue that the system continues to be in need of revamping and the efficacy of the system needs to be supported by empirical evidence. Many variables are involved with the appropriate use and supervision of EAs (e.g. training, preparation, supervision, and school efficacy); therefore the evaluation of EAs must be considered carefully, based largely on individual circumstances, and reviewed continuously, much like individualized program plans (IPP). Our students are deserving of the best possible supports, and common sense reasoning for

assignment of EA supports does not exemplify this. To make inclusion successful, it is important to not only assess the effectiveness of the EA but also the adequacy of the curriculum, instruction, and organizational arrangement of the educational system in which inclusion is occurring.

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Appendix A

PARENT/ GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Sibling's Perspective of Inclusion

Investigators: Dr. Judy L. Lupart Educational Psychology (U of A)

Funding Agency: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

I, _____ agree to let my child participate in the *Inclusion Across the Lifespan* project. This project has been explained to me. I understand that my son/daughter will be asked some questions regarding her inclusion in school/work and leisure settings. These interviews will be recorded and take about 30 minutes. My son/daughter's name and interview will be kept confidential. No one but the researchers will know what my son/daughter says. I do not have to answer any questions if I don't want to. I can stop the interview any time I want. I will keep a copy of the consent form. If I have any questions I can call (780) 492-0800 for Angie. I understand that I can contact the U of A Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751 if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Signature: _____

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Inclusion Across the Lifespan

Investigators: Dr. Judy L. Lupart Educational Psychology (U of A)
Dr. Vianne Timmons Educational Psychology (U of PEI)

Funding Agency: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

The Information requested on this form is being collected pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP). Information acquired through this form has been approved by your school board and will be kept secure and access the information is restricted to the researchers and their research assistants.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. The attached Letter of Information gives you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about this research project, please ask. Please take the time to read the Letter of Information carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I understand that such consent will allow the investigators or their research assistants to interview me about the inclusive practices in my classroom.

I understand that such consent will allow the investigators or their research assistants to observe the inclusive practices in my classroom during regularly scheduled activities for the duration of such activities..

I understand that my participation in this study may be terminated at any time. Participating in this project and/or withdrawal from this project will not affect my request or receipt of services from the school board or other organizations that provide services for myself or the children in my class.

I understand that this study will not involve any greater risk to myself or the children I teach than those ordinarily occurring in daily life.

I understand that all data collected will be recorded with names coded to ensure anonymity of myself and the child.

I understand that all data will be kept secure in a locked office at the University of Alberta and the University of Prince Edward Island and destroyed five years after the publication of the study results.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your participation in the research project and that you agree or disagree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institutions from their legal or professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw at anytime. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation in this project. If you should have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Angela Irvine 492-0800
Dr. Judy L. Lupart 492-2198

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR DECISION CHOICE BELOW:

I,_____, hereby give consent for the investigators and their research assistants to interview me about the inclusive practices in my classroom.

I,_____, hereby give consent for the investigators and their research assistants to observe the inclusive practices in my classroom.

_____ _____
Signature of Teacher Date

Appendix B

Research Questions for Student Participants: Student Perceptions of the Role and Impact of Paraprofessional support

Actual names will be substituted into interviews as a substitute for your assistant

Questions to cover the perspectives on potential social, academic and personal impact of paraprofessional support on included students

1. Does your assistant help you learn to make friends?
2. Does your assistant go to/play in the park with you at recess?
3. Who do you spend more time with at school, your assistant or other kids?
4. Do the other kids like your assistant? Why or why not?
5. When you play/or are with your friends at school, is your assistant there too? If yes, do they help? Do you want them there?
6. Do you need your assistant around to play with others? If yes, why?
7. Does your assistant help other kids too or just you?
8. Do you and your assistant do things/activities together that the other kids don't do? What kind of things?
9. Does anyone encourage you to play with other kids or join groups? Who?
10. Are you in any school groups? What groups? If yes, does your assistant go with you?
11. Who sits beside you in your classroom?
12. Does your assistant ever answer questions for you?
13. What do you like about having _____as an assistant?
14. What don't you like about having _____ as an assistant?
15. What is the most important thing your assistant does with you?

16. Is there anything your assistant helps you with that you could do by yourself? If yes, what?
17. Do you like seeing your assistant at school?
18. How does having your assistant around make you feel?
19. What is your assistant's job?
20. What does your assistant do to help you? For you?
21. Do you need your assistant?
22. For what? Why if possible?
23. Is your assistant beside you a lot of the time?
24. Do like it when your assistant is close to you or farther away? Why?
25. Does your assistant hold your hand?
26. Does your teacher hold your hand?
27. Who do you spend more time with? Teacher or assistant (using names)?
28. Does your assistant help you learn? How?
29. Does your teacher help you learn? How?
30. Who helps you more? _____ or _____
31. Who is your favorite adult at school?

Research Questions for Parent Participants: Parent Perceptions of the Role and Impact of Paraprofessional support

Actual names will be substituted into interviews as a substitute for your assistant

Questions to cover the perspectives on potential social, academic and personal impact of paraprofessional support on included students

1. Does your child's assistant help them learn to make friends? If so, how?
2. Who does your child spend more time with at school, the assistant or other kids?
3. Who does your child prefer to spend his/her time with, their assistant or the other kids?
4. Does your child like his/her assistant? Why or why not?
5. Do the other kids like your child's assistant? Why or why not?
6. Does your child's assistant go to/play in the park with them at recess? What does the assistant do to help your child at recess? Do you think that your child needs his/her assistant with him/her at recess?
7. When your child plays/or is with his/her friends at school, is his/her assistant there too? If yes, does the assistant help? If so, how does he/she help? Do you think your child wants him/her there?
8. Does your child need their assistant around to play with others? If yes, why?
9. Does the assistant help other kids too or just your child?
10. Does your child and the assistant do things/activities together that the other kids don't do? What kind of things? Why do they do these separate things?
11. Does anyone encourage your child to play with other kids or join groups? Who?

12. Is your child in any school groups or extracurricular activities? What ones? If yes, does the assistant go with them?
13. Who sits beside your child in the classroom?
14. Is the assistant beside your child a lot of the time?
15. How do you think _____'s assistant helps his/her inclusion in the school?
16. Does the assistant ever answer questions for your child?
17. What do you like about having _____as an assistant for your child?
18. What don't you like about having _____ as an assistant for your child?
19. Is there anything you would change about _____'s work with your child? What?
20. What is the most important thing the assistant does with your child?
21. Is there anything the assistant helps your child with that they could do by themselves? If yes, what?
22. How does having the assistant around make your child feel?
23. What is the assistant's job?
24. What does the assistant do to help your child? For your child?
25. Does your child need their assistant? For what? Why if possible?
26. Who does your child spend more time with? Teacher or assistant (using names)?
27. Does the assistant help your child to learn? How?
28. Does the teacher help your child to learn? How?
29. Who helps them more?_____ or _____

Research Questions for Assistant Participants: Assistant Perceptions of the Role and Impact of Paraprofessional support

Children's names will be substituted for "the child".

Questions to cover the perspectives on potential social, academic and personal impact of paraprofessional support on included students

1. Do you help the child you work with learn to make friends? If so, how?
2. Who does the child spend more time interacting with at school, you or other kids?
3. Who does the child prefer to spend his/her time with, you or the other kids?
4. Do you go to/play in the park with him/her at recess? What do you to help the child at recess? Do you think that the child needs you with him/her at recess?
5. When the child plays/or is with his/her friends at school, are you there too? If yes, do you help? If so, how do you help? Do you think the child wants you there?
6. Does the child need you around to play/socialize appropriately with others? If yes, why?
7. Do you spend time helping other kids in the class? What ratio of time would you say is spent with _____ vs. other kids in the class?
8. Do you and the child you work with do things/activities together that the other kids don't do? What kind of things? Why do you do these separate things?
9. Do you encourage the child to play with other kids or join groups? How?
10. Is the child in any school groups or extracurricular activities? What ones? If yes, do you go with them?
11. Who sits beside the child in the classroom?
12. What percentage of time would you say you are beside the child?

13. How do you think you have helped facilitate the child's inclusion in the school?

14. Do you ever have to answer questions for the child? When or for what reasons?

15. What do you like about working as an assistant?

16. What don't you like about working as an assistant?

17. What would you change about your job as an assistant?

18. What is the most important thing you do with the child?

19. Is there anything you help the child with that they could do by themselves? If yes, what?

20. How do you think _____ feels about having an assistant?

21. What is your job?

22. What are the specific activities/tasks you do to help the child / For the child?

23. Does the child need you as an assistant? For what and Why?

24. Who does your child spend more time with? Teacher or you? Why?

25. How do you help the child to learn?

26. How does the teacher help them to learn?

27. Who helps them more? You or the teacher?

Appendix C

Summary of Inclusion Across the Lifespan Project for Parents

Hello, my name is Dr. Judy Lupart. I am a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, conducting a research project titled "Inclusion Across the Lifespan" along with my co-investigator, Dr. Vianne Timmons (University of Prince Edward Island) and our research teams. We would like to invite you and your son/daughter/person under your legal guardianship to participate.

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences children and adults with developmental disabilities have when being included in school and recreation with their nondisabled peers. We would like to talk to your son/daughter/person under your legal guardianship, as well as his/her teacher or employer and yourself about his/her integration into school/work, and leisure activities. These interviews will take approximately 30-45 minutes each.

We would also like to come and visit your son/daughter/person under your legal guardianship at school/work and in some leisure activities. These visits will be scheduled at the convenience of everyone involved and will help us to more clearly understand your son's/daughter's experiences.

At the end of our study, a wrap-up family symposium will be held. This symposium will allow anyone who was involved in our study to provide us with feedback and to gain information about our project.

Results from this study, which will be published in articles and graduate student theses, will ensure that no identifying information of the participants and their families are released. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary and, if you choose to participate, you and your son/daughter/person under your legal guardianship are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

It is hoped that by documenting the stories of individuals with developmental disabilities within the context of current policies, common themes considered to be core to successful inclusion will be identified. These can then be used to form recommendations for future practice in schools, businesses, and leisure settings. The stories told by these individuals will be able to identify the intricate relationship between people with developmental disabilities and the context they live in.

If you have any further questions regarding this study please contact Judy Lupart, Canada Research Chair in Special Education at 492-2198 or Angie Irvine 492-0800.

Teacher Letter of Information

Dear Teacher:

My Name is Dr. Judy Lupart, I am a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, conducting a research project along with one co-investigator, Dr. Vianne Timmons (University of Prince Edward Island) and research assistants and graduate students whom work with either myself or Dr. Timmons. We would like to invite you to participate in our study "Inclusion Across the Lifespan".

This letter is to provide information regarding our research project, so that you can make an informed decision regarding your participation. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of individuals with developmental disabilities and their "stories" of inclusion at different life stages, and to analyze these "stories" to identify trends and patterns of inclusion that exist. It is hoped that the results from this study will be used to identify commonalities and variants considered as core in successful inclusive practices that can be recommended for future practice. Overall, there will be approximately 60 individuals (from both Alberta and Prince Edward Island) as well as their families and employers/teachers participating in this part of the study. A separate consent form has been sent to the child's parents and, where applicable, the individual his/herself.

If you agree to participate, the investigators or their research assistants will come to your classroom to interview you about the participant's inclusion and, at a later date, may come to your classroom to observe the inclusive practices in your class. This period of observation will in no way affect the normal routine in your classroom. In addition to the interviews and observation period the current policies in your provinces will be investigated through a document analysis to compare individual experiences to what is required by these policies.

Participation in this study will involve no greater risks than those ordinarily experienced in daily life. You should be aware that even if you give your permission for participation, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason without penalty. Results, which we will be reporting in published articles or graduate student theses, will ensure complete anonymity of all participants. To maintain the anonymity of all participants, the results from individual interviews will not be made available to you but will be include in a summary of results in published articles. All information gathered from interviews and observations will be securely stored in a locked office and will only be accessible to those who are directly involved with this research project.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact my research assistant Angela Irvine at 492-0800, or the Office of the Vice President (Research) at 492-5353. Two copies of the consent form are provided. Please return a signed copy, which indicates your decision concerning your participation in this research using the stamped envelope provided. The other copy can be retained for your records.